

# “A Hell of Blood and Suffering”: Experiences of Former Child Soldiers in Exile

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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract  Children have participated in wars throughout history. Even today there are hundreds of thousands of child soldiers around the world despite international prohibitions. Whereas research of former child soldiers in their home countries indicates that participating in war negatively affects their social, emotional, psychological, and physical well-being, little is known about the challenges they face when forcibly migrating to the West. This vulnerable group has not only experienced the major transition from a military to a civilian environment but also that of entering a new culture. Due to the dearth of research on their lives in a new culture, it is necessary to learn more about this particular group in order to provide assistance which coincides better with their specific needs. The aim of this social psychological study was to learn how five former child soldiers from Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Somalia, and El Salvador, respectively, described their experiences of having been child soldiers and having lived in Finland or Sweden. Open ended interviews were conducted to gather these descriptions. Both their subjective and shared experiences were examined using Giorgi’s descriptive phenomenological method, which emphasizes the significance of human experiences and allows the researcher to remain open to the participants’ descriptions without imposing formal theories on them. The findings of this study suggest a temporal and thematic structure of the phenomenon of child soldiery, which includes their experiences of refuge in Finland/Sweden. The results also support previous research of former child soldiers and cross-cultural psychological research of refugees and immigrants in acculturation. Overall, the experience of child soldiery meant forced or voluntary separation from family, multiple losses, lack of control and other hardships. It also had a strong emotional aspect, both negative and positive. While all faced various struggles in the aftermath of war, some continued to behave according to the practices they had learned in the armed group while others behaved pro-socially, both when reintegrating to civil society and adapting to a new culture. For most participants the encounter with a new culture largely amplified the traumas they had experienced as child soldiers.			
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# 1 Introduction

Over the last two decades, the topic of children actively involved in armed conflicts has garnered world-wide attention (Honwana, 2006, p. 1). Child soldiers have featured in both international and Finnish media in various ways such as TV programs, newspaper and magazine articles, documentaries and films. Former child soldiers have themselves contributed to making the topic known through autobiographies and music<sup>1</sup>. Besides media depictions, the subject has also been addressed in political, humanitarian, and academic discourse (Honwana, 2006, p. 2; Denov, 2010, p. 5).

In the media as well as in discussions over policy, there is a tendency to depict child soldiers in rather extreme and contrasting ways. Some perceive them as powerless victims who are under the control of rebel commanders and broad societal powers (Denov, 2010, pp. 2–3, 7–9), while others portray them as primitive, dangerous, and wicked perpetrators and sociopaths who are beyond cure (Aning & McIntyre, 2005, pp. 76–77; Denov, 2010, pp. 6–7; Macmillan, 2009, p. 40; Peters & Richards, 1998, p. 183). The latter type of representations may even have racial undertones (see Macmillan, 2009). Lately, child soldiers have additionally been portrayed as heroic in contemporary western media. Those former child soldiers living in the West, in particular, have become celebrities and are described as being courageous, having survived immense brutality and, regardless of their active involvement in hostilities, having gained redemption. The three types of portrayals presented are often limiting and fail to capture child soldiers' authentic experiences, which seldom can be classified into one sole category. Rather, their experiences consist of the contradictory features of all three categories. This is what constitutes one of the major challenges that child soldiers have to deal with following the end of a conflict. (Denov, 2010, pp. 2, 11–12, 109–110.) These depictions have, moreover, been gender-biased, ignoring the existence of girl soldiers. Being invisible has been the defining feature of the latter group. (Denov, 2010, p. 2, 6; Aning & McIntyre, 2005, pp. 76–77.)

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<sup>1</sup> See newspapers articles such as ICC's Legal Landmark; Thomas Lubanga found guilty of using child soldiers to rape, murder, 15.3.2012; Beah's (2007) autobiographical book; films such as *Blood Diamond* (2006) directed by Edward Zwick and *Machine Gun Preacher* (2011) directed by Marc Forster.

Although the topic of child soldiery has recently gained much interest, it is far from a new phenomenon. Children have participated in wars throughout history (Furley, 1995, pp. 28–29). For example, children of both genders were actively involved in the Children’s Crusade in 1212<sup>2</sup> (Honwana, 2006, pp. 26–27). For an example closer to home, it was relatively not so long ago that Finnish minors participated in the Winter War of 1939–40 (e.g. Trotter, 1991/2003, p. 232). Hitherto, children have remained unnoticed in literature on political violence. One reason for this could be that they were not perceived differently from adults, just miniature versions. This was the European view of children up until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Furley, 1995, p. 28.)

Despite international agreements, which prohibit the recruitment of minors to armed forces and their participation in hostilities, it is currently estimated that there are around 250,000–300,000 child soldiers around the world, out of which, nearly 50% are in sub-Saharan Africa (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008; Klasen, Schrage, Post & Adam, 2011). It is, however, impossible to give an exact estimation of the amount of child soldiers in the world, due to difficulties in accessing some conflict zones, armed forces concealing their recruitment of children for legal and political purposes, and so on (Denov, 2010, pp. 23–24). Nevertheless, since January 2011, children continue to be used as soldiers by both governmental and non-governmental armed forces in 19 countries worldwide<sup>3</sup>. In “The Paris Principles” (2007, p. 7) a child soldier is defined as “*any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities.*” This legal definition of a child soldier is employed in this study (see Appendix A

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<sup>2</sup> For a historical overview of children’s participation in wars, see e.g. Honwana, (2006).

<sup>3</sup> Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Colombia, Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, India, Iraq, Israel, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen. In addition, the Lord’s Resistance Army (an armed group which was initiated in Uganda) is active the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan and continues to recruit and use child soldiers in its ranks. (Child Soldiers International, 2012, pp. 20–21.)



for a discussion on the cultural, historical, and legal perspectives of “childhood” and “child soldier”).

During the last decades, research on children’s participation in war and political conflicts has increased (Denov & Maclure, 2007). Up to the present, the majority of studies on former child soldiers have been conducted in the youths’ home countries. Very few studies have, in fact, been conducted on those who have been forced to flee their home countries and have sought refuge in the West; although there are some exceptions (e.g. Kanagaratnam, Raundalen and Asbjørnsen, 2005). Despite this, some children who have been forced to leave their home countries carry the experience of having served as soldiers with them to their new surroundings (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008). While studies (e.g. Denov, 2010; Dickson-Gómez, 2003; Johannessen & Holgersen, 2013) conducted in the youths’ home countries show that participating in war has negative consequences for children’s social, emotional, psychological and physical well-being when reintegrating<sup>4</sup> into civil society, little is known about the challenges that former child soldiers forcibly migrating to the West undergo. Not only has this vulnerable group experienced a transition from a military environment to a civilian one, but they have also experienced another major transition, that of entering a new culture. Due to the dearth of research on the lives these youths lead in a new culture, it should be considered of great import to learn more about this particular group. Their experiences would be vital to study in order to gain a better understanding of the issues they are struggling with and also for facilitating their adaptation into a new culture.

The aim of my study is to find out how former child soldiers describe their past child soldier experiences and their experiences of living in the West. Giorgi’s (2009) descriptive phenomenological psychology provides a good foundation for studying former child soldiers’ experiences via their descriptions because of its non-theoretical perspective and its adaptability to social psychological research. A non-theoretical perspective implies that it does not require the researcher to use a particular theory in conducting the analysis. Rather, the aim for the

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<sup>4</sup> “Reintegration” means the procedure of assisting ex-soldiers in returning to civilian life and re-adapt in social and economic ways (Machel, 2001, p.14). For a more detailed definition see Denov (2010, p. 15). This definition ought not to be confused with “integration”, which is an acculturation strategy that immigrants can adopt within the new society of settlement (Sam & Berry, 2010).

researcher is to look for the meanings that the participants themselves apply to their experiences. (Ibid.)

In an attempt to find former child soldiers living in the West I contacted numerous organizations and people working with immigrants in Finland, Sweden and other European countries. In the end, I found five participants from Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Somalia, and El Salvador who had served in the following armed groups: Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC), Union des Patriotes Congolais (UPC), Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), United Somali Congress (USC), and Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN), respectively, during their childhood and had lived in Finland or Sweden for several years. I conducted very open ended interviews with them following the ethical guidelines I had received from a psychologist who has worked with traumatized immigrants in Finland. In the analysis, I searched for social psychologically relevant meanings in the participants' descriptions (e.g. emotional, social, racial, relational, cultural, cross-cultural aspects). I highlighted their subjective experiences and also the experiences they had in common. Following the analysis, I was able to connect the empirical findings to results from previous studies on former child soldiers and to relevant social psychological theories (Perttula, 2000, p. 440). In the latter case, I applied mainly findings from cross-cultural psychology, since former child soldiers implicitly have been included in studies on refugees and immigrants (see e.g. Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008). My hope is that this study can be of assistance for people working with these youths and perhaps for the youths themselves. In the following section, I briefly describe the structure of this study.

### ***1.1 Structure of the thesis***

The following Chapter 2 comprises an overview of previous literature on former child soldiers and refugees. I begin by giving an overview of the studies conducted on this specific topic, after which I introduce the five armed groups that the participants were part of in section 2.2. In the remainder of the chapter I account for former child soldiers' experiences beginning with their recruitment to postwar experiences. Chapter 3 consists of a presentation of the theoretical framework of this thesis, namely Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological psychology.

The chapter ends with an introduction of my research questions. In Chapter 4, I introduce the descriptive phenomenological method. I begin by explaining why I chose to study this specific topic and then describe the sampling procedure, the sample, the ethical guidelines of this study, the type of interview conducted and the practical steps of data collection and analysis. In Chapter 5, I present the results of my study, following which I critically assess the research procedure and the reliability of the data in Chapter 6. I end the thesis with a summary of the results where I also link my findings to relevant studies and possible future research. We will now turn to the literature review.

## **2 Literature Review of the Phenomenon of Child Soldierly**

### ***2.1 An overview***

Studies related to child soldiers have been conducted in various disciplines, such as the social sciences (e.g. social work, Corbin, 2008; anthropology, Honwana, 2006; political sociology, Macmillan, 2009), the behavioural sciences, e.g. psychiatry and other fields of psychology (e.g. Bayer, Klasner & Adam, 2007; Veale, 2005; Veale & Stavrou, 2007; Wessells, 2009), and in international law (e.g. Happold, 2005). The topic has also been covered from a variety of different angles such as child soldiers' own accounts of their experiences of war (Denov, 2010), former child soldiers' mental health (Betancourt, Agnew-Blais, Gilman, Williams and Ellis, 2010), the evaluations of rehabilitation programs for former child soldiers (Hill & Langholtz, 2003), child soldiers' positions in international law (Sipilä, 2011), and media portrayals of child soldiers (Macmillan, 2009). The scope of research has also widened to include the experiences of staff working with child soldiers (Johannessen & Holgersen, 2013) as well as the mental well-being of the children of former child soldiers (Song, Jong & Koopman, 2013). Furthermore, studies on the topic have also been conducted at post- and undergraduate levels in international settings as well as in Finland (e.g. Suikkanen, 2010)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Suikkanen (2010) studied the amount of tortured and highly traumatized children and youth under 24 years of age who have come to Finland as asylum seekers and refugees and their need for psychiatric services. Amongst these children and youth there were several former child soldiers. Still, it is not a study which focuses exclusively on former child soldiers.

Scholars' explanations for why children participate in armed conflicts are rather contrastive (Denov, 2010, pp. 20–21). For example, according to Singer (2005, p. 55), children are recruited by armed forces because they, in contrast to adults, seldom demand to be paid for partaking in combat. This is besides the fact that they are perceived to be easy to control and mold into ruthless soldiers. By contrast, Honwana (2006, p. 44) considers neither the lack of adult males nor ease with which children are controlled as sufficient explanations for child soldiering. Rather, referring to the resemblance of children's experiences in the Sierra Leonean, Cambodian and Angolan wars, she sees the recruitment of children as a military strategy (*ibid.*, p. 44). Scholars also argue that children's participation in war has increased lately due to a qualitative change in contemporary warfare (Denov, 2010, pp. 33–34). Horowitz (1980, p. 2), for example, argues that the development of modern technology has qualitatively modified the nature of 20<sup>th</sup> century wars. Machel (2001, p. 7) adds that the accessibility of light, low-priced and easy to use weapons has led to an increase in the exploitation of children as soldiers in armed conflicts. Newman (2004, p. 179), however, argues against the change in contemporary warfare and instead points out that the media has increased awareness about ongoing conflicts around the world today<sup>6</sup>.

Regardless of scholars' stances, studies (e.g. Brett and McCallin, 1995, pp. 14–15; Honwana, 2006, p. 35) show that there are similarities in the narratives that former child soldiers in different parts of the world tell about their experiences; although these, to a large extent, seem to depend on the type of armed group in which they were affiliated. For example, several studies have been conducted of former child soldiers in the Sierra Leonean Revolutionary United Front (RUF), now inactive, and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) active in the African Great Lakes Region. Both of these armed groups are known for their vicious tactics especially in regards to their exploitation of children. The types of experiences that child soldiers in these armed groups have undergone will be illustrated in the following sections. While no other groups have garnered the kind of academic attention that the RUF and the LRA have, there is research of child soldiers in other armed groups. Even so, very few studies are extant of former child soldiers in the FMLN and the SPLA, while no studies seem to have been conducted of former child

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<sup>6</sup> See Denov (2010) and Honwana (2006) for more on these issues.

soldiers in the UPC, FLEC and USC (only reports). However, in order to get an impression of the types of armed groups the participants in my study have served in, I will now provide a brief overview of the political circumstances in which these groups arose and their exploitation of child soldiers. We begin with the FLEC.

## ***2.2 The armed groups***

### **2.2.1 Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC) – Angola**

The Cabinda enclave is detached from the rest of Angola by a narrow strip of neighboring DRC with whose inhabitants it shares a common language and ethnicity. Cabinda and Angola have been in conflict ever since colonial times under the Portuguese. (Shantz, 2005, p. 197). In more recent years, the conflict has increased in ferocity. Some of the fierceness of this conflict is directly attributable to the fact that Cabinda is oil-rich yet only receives 10 % of the area's oil incomes. (Le Billon, 2000, p. 28; Shantz, 2005, pp. 197–198.) Even after Angola's almost 30-year long civil war ended in 2003, fighting continues in the Cabinda enclave between government forces and the armed separatist group the Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda, hereafter FLEC. The group was formed by three Cabindan secessionist groups in 1963 and has, since 1974, carried on an armed struggle against the Angolan government. (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008; Honwana, 2006; Shantz, 2005, p. 197–198.) FLEC has recruited children as young as 8 years into its ranks, and it is estimated that over 30 % of the total children are girls (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2001, 2004, 2008).

According to reports, the Angolan Army has committed severe human rights violations against civilians in Cabinda at the end of 2002. FLEC, on the other hand, has been reported for having attacked government troops and kidnapped employees working for the oil company Chevron. Dubbed “Africa's forgotten war”, it has cost the lives of 30,000 people. (Shantz, 2005, pp. 197–198.) In 2006, a peace agreement was signed between the Angolan government and some Cabindan parties, including FLEC. This agreement, however, was rejected by most Cabindan parties, and so the conflict rages on (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008).

### **2.2.2 Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) – South Sudan**

Since Sudan's independence from British colonial rule in 1956, there have been ongoing conflicts and civil wars in the country. Even though the 1972 agreement granted southern Sudan autonomy, *sharia* (Islamic law) was imposed on all of Sudan in 1983, including the non-Muslim (mostly Christian) south. The Sudanese government's exploitation of oil in the south has also figured prominently in the conflict. This resulted in the formation of the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) led by John Garang (23.6.1945-30.7.2005). A second civil war broke out in 1983 between the north and the south that has led to the death of two million people and the displacement of four million people, mostly from the south. (Deng, 2008, p. 74; Howard, 2008, p. 322; Jok, 2005, p. 1505; Yongo-Bure, 2009, p. 68–69.) Furthermore, an estimated 100,000 children have been recruited and used as soldiers in the civil war by both government forces and the SPLA, who began recruiting children into its ranks in the 1980's (Singer, 2005, p. 24).

The SPLA arranged for boys to flee from the conflict to refugee camps placed near the SPLA military bases in Ethiopia. (Singer, 2005, p. 24.) It is estimated that 25,000 children walked long distances through the desert, during which many fell prey to wild animals (Geltman et al., 2005, p. 585). Those children recruited by the SPLA became known as “the Red Army” (Singer, 2005, pp. 24–25). Due to the collapse of the Ethiopian regime, many of these children fled to other refugee camps in Kenya, for instance. Since the year 2000, many of these unaccompanied minors have resettled in the United States. In the media, they have been described as “the Lost Boys of Sudan” (Geltman et al., 2005, p. 585).

Since 1989, with the help of neighboring countries and the international community, several attempts have been made to negotiate peace between the SPLA and the government. In 2005 the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in Kenya effectively ending the civil war (Yongo-Bure, 2009, p. 68). Southern Sudan became fully independent in 2011 (After Years of Struggle, South Sudan becomes a New Nation 9.7.2011). Nonetheless, there are still ongoing conflicts in the region (see e.g. International Committee of the Red Cross [hereafter, ICRC] Annual Report, 2013, pp. 201–211).

### **2.2.3 Union des Patriotes Congolais (UPC) – The Democratic Republic of Congo**

The Democratic Republic of Congo<sup>7</sup> (henceforth, the DRC), formerly a Belgian colony, exploded into conflict in 1998. Known as Africa's “first world war”, it involved seven nations<sup>8</sup>. In the Ituri district (the northeastern part of the country) armed groups were frequently formed along ethnic lines, some supporting the pastoralist Hema (like the UPC) and others the agriculturalist Lendu. Having received arms and training from the governments of Uganda, Rwanda and the DRC, the various local, armed groups battled for control of the natural resources (gold mines and minerals) in the region committing severe human rights violations (e.g. the pillaging and burning of property, abductions of civilians, rapes, mutilations, and massacres) in the process. As a result, an estimated 60,000 people were killed in this tribal war. The conflict ended in 2003, though there are still other ongoing conflicts, particularly in the eastern parts of the country. (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2004; ICC’s Legal Landmark; Thomas Lubanga found guilty of using child soldiers to rape, murder, 15.3.2012; ICRC Annual Report, 2013, p. 136; Speed & Vestvik, 2009, p. 174; World News: Congolese Warlord Is Declared Guilty, 15.3.2012).

The effects of the conflict are still being felt today. Children from the ages of 8 (and sometimes as young as 7) to 17 years have been exploited as combatants by all nations and armed groups involved in the conflict. The UPC itself added 6,000 boys and girls, both forcibly and voluntarily, to its ranks. These children were used as bodyguards, sex slaves and combatants and, additionally, used for looting, abducting civilians, raping and killing. In March 2005, Thomas Lubanga, the head of the UPC, was arrested, handed over to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and sentenced to life in prison. By the end of 2006, it was estimated that 30,000 children had been released from various armed groups in the DRC. Despite efforts to criminalize the recruitment and use of child soldiers, hundreds of children continue to be recruited by

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<sup>7</sup> The Democratic Republic of Congo was under Belgian colonial rule from 1908 to 1960, during which the country and its people were brutalized by king Leopold II. In 1965, Mobutu Sese Seko took control over the country in a military coup and renamed the country Zaire. Mobutu's dictatorship lasted for 32 years, until his corrupt regime was overthrown by Kabila in 1997. (Speed & Vestvik, 2009, pp. 174–175.)

<sup>8</sup> For more on the 1998 conflict see e.g. Speed & Vestvik (2009).

Congolese armed forces. (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2004, 2008; Child Soldiers International, 2012, p. 111; ICC's Legal Landmark; Thomas Lubanga found guilty of using child soldiers to rape, murder, 15.3.2012; World News: Congolese Warlord Is Declared Guilty, 15.3.2012).

#### **2.2.4 Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberacion Nacional (FMLN) – El Salvador**

El Salvador, a one-time Spanish colony, is the smallest country in Central America. Decades of internal strife climaxed when the military took control of the country in the early 1930's then violently suppressed an indigenous uprising, organized by Farabundo Martí, massacring some 30 000 people. In the 1980's after years of brutal oppression, several revolutionary guerrillas joined together and formed the FMLN, naming themselves after the communist leader who was imprisoned and executed for his role in the rebellion. During the civil war, the military committed atrocities against civilians<sup>9</sup> while government-backed death squads terrorized the people in order to prevent them from joining the *guerrilla*. What once began as an attempted overthrow of the government by the FMLN, soon turned into a battle over territory, with the *guerrilla* managing to wrest large swathes of northern and eastern El Salvador from the government. Nevertheless, the group was not able to defeat the military, which had the backing of the United States. In 1990, the United Nations began to negotiate between the *guerrilla*<sup>10</sup> and the government which led to the signing of the Chapultepec Peace Accords in 1992. The 12 year long civil war (1980–1992) cost the lives of 80 000 Salvadorians, out of which two thirds were civilians, and lead to the displacement of one million people (Garibay, 2007, p. 467; Hume, 2009, p. 7; Alvarez, 2010, p. 18; Valtonen, 2001, pp. 305, 310–312).

One of the reasons that the civil war received worldwide attention was due to the large amount of child soldiers exploited, by both sides, in the war (Ryu, 2013, p. 87). It is estimated

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<sup>9</sup> For instance, massacres of whole villages (Garibay, 2007, p. 468). See also Dickson-Gómez (2003).

<sup>10</sup> The FMLN became a political party after the war. In fact, several FMLN candidates ran for the presidential elections in March 2014 with former guerrilla commander Salvador Sanchez Ceren winning the presidency (Seelke, 2012; Former guerrilla commander wins El Salvador presidential election 14.03.2014).



that around 2,000 out of 8,000 *guerrilla* soldiers were under 18 years of age when the peace accords was signed, while an estimated 80 % of the recruits in government forces were under-age during the conflict (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008; Ryu, 2013, p. 87; Santacruz & Arana, 2002, p. 3). In the FMLN, boys were used as combatants and messengers (Santa-Cruz & Arana, 2002, p. 7). Former child soldiers in El Salvador still continue to be exploited in various ways, and many have turned to a life of crime (see e.g. Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008; Hume, 2009; Ryu, 2013).

### **2.2.5 The United Somali Congress (USC) – Somalia**

Somalia became independent from British and Italian colonial rule in 1960. Nine years later, a coup d'état led by General Muhammad Siyaad Barre took control over the country. In 1991, his regime was defeated by clan militias led by General Mohamed Farrah Aidid. (Floyd, 2010.) A power struggle (1991–1992) broke out in the lawless capital Mogadishu between Mohamed Farrah Aidid, head of the United Somali Congress (USC) and member of the Hawiye clan<sup>11</sup> and Ali Mahdi leader of the Manifesto Group consisting of politicians, merchants and ex-officers from the south. (Abdullahi, 2005, p. 1410; Menkhaus & Lyons, 1993, p. 3.) Africa Watch (1993) estimates that 14,000 people were killed and another 27,000 wounded between November 1991 and February 1992. The conflict also displaced some 400,000 Somalis to Kenya, 300,000 to Ethiopia, and many hundreds of thousands around the world (Menkhaus & Lyon, 1993, p. 3). In March 1992, a cease fire was signed by both parties putting an official end to the conflict (Africa Watch, 1993). General Mohamed Farrah Aidid eventually succumbed to battle injuries and died in 1996 (Thousands Mourn Loss of Aidid, 03.08.1996).

Both sides of the conflict have used child soldiers (mostly boys and some younger than 10 years old). While there is no information on how many child soldiers actually took part in the war, an estimated 300,000 armed men and boys were involved in the fighting in Mogadishu.

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11 Twenty-five percent of Somalis belong to this clan, who are mainly Muslim extremists and established in the north of the capital city. Somalia has five main clans, but many more sub-clans. These clans have often battled against each other for resources and territory. (See e.g. Floyd, 2010, for more on this issue). Although both Ali Mahdi and Aidid belonged to the Hawiye clan, they came from different sub-clans (Abdullahi 2005, p. 1410).

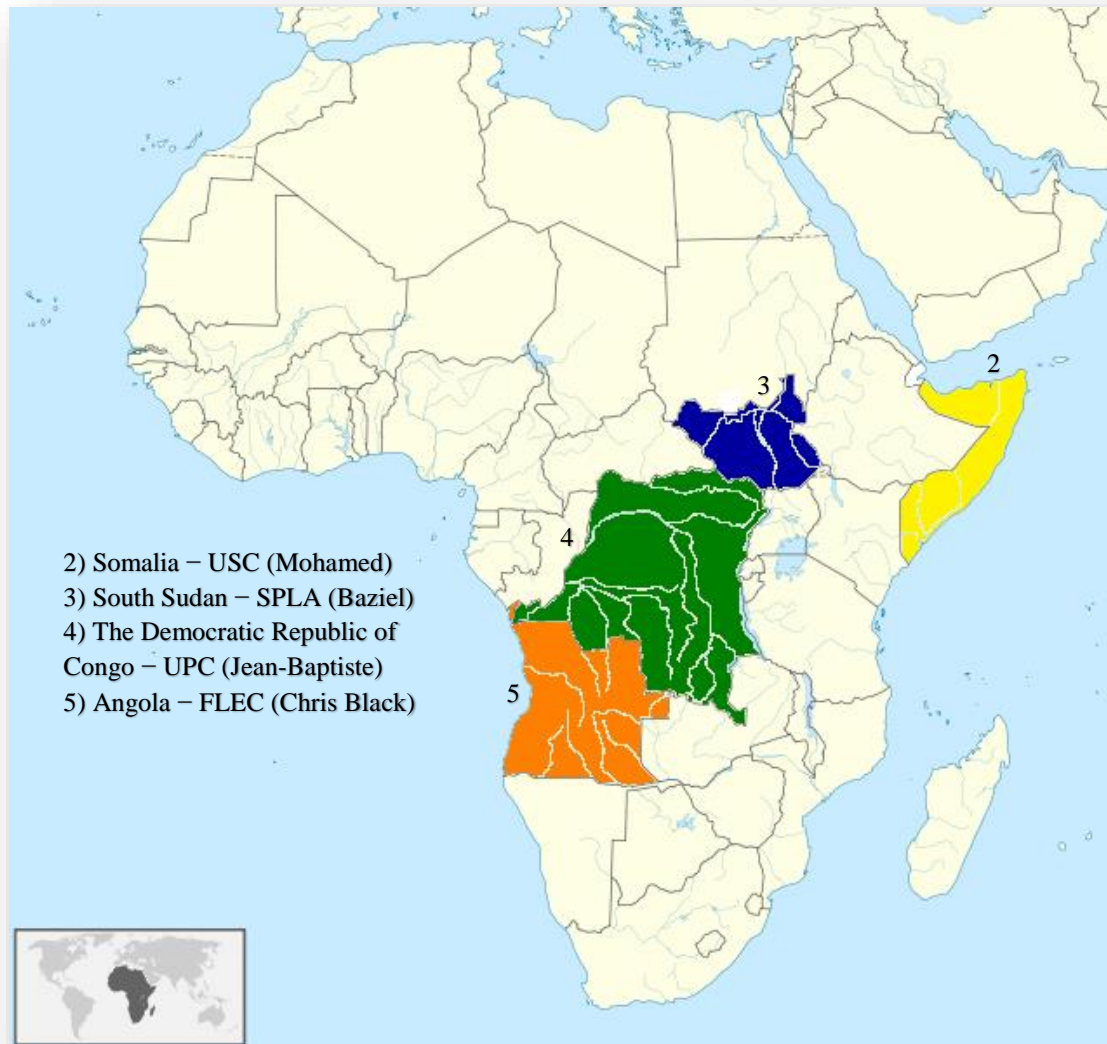
Unlike child soldiers in other wars (e.g. in Uganda), these children were not trained or disciplined. The report goes on to state that the boys mostly joined the armed groups for adventure. (Africa Watch Committee & Physicians for Human Rights, 1992.)

The use of child soldiers in other ongoing conflicts is rife in Somalia. In 2002, an estimated 200,000 Somali children (5 % of the country's child population) had carried a gun or served as soldiers in armed groups. One such group is Al-Shabaab (Arabic for “the Youth”), a jihadist organization fighting to topple the government and wage war on the West (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2004; ICRC Annual Report, 2013, p. 192; Floyd, 2010). This should be taken into consideration by Finnish social services and other organizations providing aid for refugees/immigrants, particularly since Finland has a considerable amount of Somali immigrants. Figures 1 and 2 (below) illustrate where the participants and armed groups originated.

*Figure 1: Central America (El Salvador)*



*Figure 2: Sub-Saharan Africa (Somalia, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo & Angola)*



In the following sections, I will present some findings from research on former child soldiers' experiences. Because of the dearth of research conducted of former child soldiers in the FLEC, SPLA, UPC, FMLN and USC, this literature review consists mainly of a general overview of results from studies conducted on former child soldiers in various armed forces around the world. The majority of these are from Africa (since most studies I have found have been conducted in Africa, and, furthermore, the majority of the participants are from Africa), but there are also examples from South and Central America and Asia.

### ***2.3 Recruitment strategies and experiences***

Broadly, recruitment strategies can be categorized into *conscription*, *forced* and *voluntary* recruitment. *Conscription* refers to state-inferred obligations of military service. In most countries, citizens, particularly males, are required to carry out military service when aged 18 or more. Despite this, governments may recruit underage children due to corruption, shortage of adult male soldiers or lack of birth certificates and so on. This makes it difficult to assess the age of recruits. (Brett & McCallin, 1995, pp. 77–82.) *Forced recruitment* refers to instances when children are press-ganged into joining or abducted by an armed group. Members of an armed group may collect children (whether orphans, street children or otherwise) in various places, such as, schools, streets and markets and coerce them to join the armed force for pragmatic purposes while some government-sponsored armed groups may target ethnically, racially or religiously distinct peoples, who they see as a threat (Brett & McCallin, 1995, pp. 83–85, 90) The UPC has employed a mixed forced recruitment strategy. In the beginning of the conflict, families of the ethnic group Hema, which support the UPC, had to surrender either a child to the armed groups or pay them off<sup>12</sup> (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2004). According to the International Criminal Court, the UPC has been accused of seizing children from the streets and taken them to camps for military training (ICC’s legal landmark; Thomas Lubanga found guilty of using child soldiers to rape, murder, 15.3.2012).

Children are also abducted when armed forces enter their villages to kill civilians, loot and set their homes on fire (Brett and McCallin, 1995, p. 85). In the process of abduction children may experience death threats if they do not join the armed group (Trenholm, Olsson, Blomqvist & Ahlberg, 2012, p. 211). Other children are actually injured in the process. A former RUF child soldier described how he was shot in the leg and forced to join the RUF; it was, he continued, “*as if death had come to collect [him]*” (Denov, 2010, p. 97). In the LRA children have also been tied up and beaten as well as forced to witness killings, looting, torture and destruction (Vindevoel, Coppens, Derluyn, de Schryver, Loots and Broekaert, 2011, p. 555). Some even witness their parents being killed in front of their eyes (Denov, 2010, p. 97) study.

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<sup>12</sup> Others studies have shown that children from poor families share a similar fate since their parents cannot afford to purchase their freedom or send them out of the country (e.g. Machel, 2001, p. 8).

Others children are, instead, forced to murder their own family members, such as one boy, abducted by the LRA, who was commanded to hack his parents to death with an ax. Though he refused, his parents urged him to do what the LRA commanded in order to save his own life<sup>13</sup>. (Eichstaedt, 2009, p. 1.) While death, in various forms, may be the result of not obeying orders, another consequence is mutilation (ibid. 2). Girls are often raped (see e.g. Honwana, 2006, p. 75 Mazurana, McKay, Carlson and Kasper, 2002, p. 113). Children who are abducted experience feelings of terror and fear (see e.g. Denov, 2010, pp. 97–98 and Denov & Maclure, 2006, p. 124 for examples from Sierra Leone; UNICEF, 2002, p. 24 for examples from Cambodia and East Timor); disorientation (Denov, 2010, p. 97), physical pain (Mazurana et al., 2002, p. 113), loss and separation from family (e.g. Betancourt et. al., 2009, 8; Denov, 2010, p. 98), and feelings of loneliness as a result of this separation (Denov & Maclure, 2006, p. 124). Denov (2010, p. 98) states that for the participants in her study, “*the abduction represented an abrupt and thoroughly traumatic turning point that fundamentally altered the course of their lives*”.

Children may, however, also *voluntarily* join an armed group for a number of reasons. Some children joined an armed group for *ideological reasons*, such as, fighting for liberty, rights or against unjust circumstances<sup>14</sup> (Brett & McCallin, 1995, p. 98; Bjørkhaug, 2010, p.15). Commitment and desire to change the conditions in El Salvador were listed as reasons for children joining the FMLN (Santacruz & Arana, 2002, p. 4; see also Dickson-Gómez, 2003, p. 342). Children also join armed forces due to *hatred* and *revenge* against other armed groups that have killed their family members (Brett & McCallin, 1995, p. 95). Revenge was also mentioned as a cause by El Salvadorian children for joining the FMLN (Dickson-Gómez, 2003, p. 340; Santacruz & Arana, 2002, p. 4). The participants in Dickson-Gómez’s (2003, p. 334) study had, for example, all lost close family members in brutal ways, one of which describes how he witnessed the decapitation of his father when he was seven years old. Other children join an armed group for the *status* (Garbarino, Kostelny & Dubrow, 1991, p. 16), *excitement* (Brett & McCallin, 1995, p. 94), or other *opportunities* like education (Veale, 2005, p. 111) that being in

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<sup>13</sup> Committing atrocities against and killing one’s own family members might also take place later on during the children’s indoctrination into the armed group, as will be described in the next section.

<sup>14</sup> Volunteering for religious motives, in order to partake in jihad, for example, could also be included here (Philippine Coalition to Stop the Use of Children as Soldiers, 2004, p. 52).

the military could bring. Children who volunteer for these latter reasons have described their experiences more positively, linking words such as ‘bravery’, ‘power’ and ‘beauty’ to being a soldier (see e.g. Özerdem, Podder and Quitoriano 2010, p. 313). Sometimes children also follow their *peers* or *family members* into the armed group (see e.g. Veale, 2005, p. 109; Özerdem et al’s, 2010, p. 313) or out of a sense of duty (Bjørkhaug, 2010, p. 9).

The word “voluntary” does not always adequately describe the realities of why children join armed forces, since children may simply join an armed force in order to survive or escape something they perceive as worse (e.g. forced marriage<sup>15</sup>, poverty<sup>16</sup>) or because they have no other viable options (Veale, 2005, p. 109, 111). Amongst the reasons for children joining the FMLN was survival (Santacruz & Arana, 2002, p. 4). Former FMLN child soldiers in Dickson-Gómez’s (2003, p. 343) study, had instead, grown up in guerrilla camps and had few options but to volunteer as soldiers in the *guerrilla*. The way that thousands of Southern Sudanese boys were recruited by the SPLA is quite particular. Lured by the SPLA with the promised of education, they were separated from their families in order to travel to refugee camps<sup>17</sup> in Ethiopia where they received military training instead. (Children Rights Project and Human Rights Watch, 1994, pp. 7, 14; Rone, 1995, pp. 9, 50.) We will now turn to look at children’s experiences of being part of an armed group.

## ***2.4 Initiation, indoctrination and training experiences***

Following recruitment, the often brutal process of initiation (akin to that of adults) begins (Machel, 2001, p. 12; Singer, 2005, p. 71). The overall purpose of this process is to make the children committed to the goals of the armed group and follow orders that involve risk-taking and violence (Singer, 2005, p. 71). This process commences by cutting the children off from their families and disconnecting them from their past. Now, under the authority of the armed

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<sup>15</sup> See e.g. Veale (2005, p. 111) for an example of escaping forced marriage.

<sup>16</sup> See Trenholm, Olsson, Blomqvist and Ahlberg (2013, p. 211) for examples of children joining an armed force due to poverty.

<sup>17</sup> Other children fled to the same camps with their families due to the destruction of their villages by the government army or other tribal armed forces (Children Rights Project and Human Rights Watch, 1994, p. 7).

group the children have lost all control. (See e.g. Denov, 2010, p. 104; Honwana, 2006, pp. 58–59). Some armed groups deliberately try to create a family-like unity. For example, in the RUF, abductees were told that their family and community ties had been cut off and that they were now affiliated with the rebels. They then tried to replace the broken relationships with new RUF ones by offering the children (particularly boys) protection and nurturing. One boy was told that his parents were dead and that the commander was now his father. This boy was taken everywhere the commander went and eventually forgot about his parents. (Denov, 2010, pp. 104–105; see Honwana 2006, pp. 58–59 and Singer, 2005, p. 72 for more examples.) A mixture of patronage and violence has been exploited by the SPLA in an attempt to make children loyal to and dependent on the rebel group instead of their families (Ensor, year missing, p. 279). Sometimes children are also advised not to be in contact with civilians (Gutiérrez Sanín, 2008, p. 17). Being socially isolated makes children even more obedient to the armed group (e.g. Maxted 2003, p. 61).

Following this break with the past (as well as the surrounding community), the children may then be verbally abused (Maclure & Denov, 2006, p. 126), humiliated (Singer, 2005, p. 71), threatened with assault, mutilation, and/or death (Denov, 2010, p. 122), and beaten (Honwana, 2006; ICC’s legal landmark; Thomas Lubanga found guilty of using child soldiers to rape, murder, 15.3.2012; Singer, 2005, p. 71–72; Trenholm et al., 2012, p. 212; Veale & Stavrou, 2007, p. 282) in order to psychologically demoralize them. Other children might have to endure starvation, sleep deprivation (Trenholm et al., 2012, p. 212), light deprivation (Honwana, 2006, p. 59), witnessing brutality, torture and death (see e.g. Maclure & Denov, 2006, p.126; Veale & Stavrou, 2007, p. 282) to this same effect. In some armed groups, making a mistake (such as falling asleep while on guard/walking ahead of the group/complaining) or disobeying orders can be fatal (e.g. Bjørkhaug, 2010, pp. 12, 17; Trenholm et al., 2012, p. 212; Veale & Stavrou, 2007, p. 282).

The most popular form of initiation into armed groups (particularly into those groups that are the most dependent on child soldiers) is ritual killings of other people shortly after the children have been abducted (Singer, 2005, p. 74). This strategy is meant to “*break down resistance to the group’s authority and destroy taboos about killing*” (ibid., p. 74). Sometimes children are even forced to commit atrocities against their own family members and/or

communities – a practice used to sever family ties so completely as to make it impossible for children to return to their homes and, in addition, to make them completely committed to the armed group (Denov, 2010, p. 104). Children in Angola and Mozambique have been forced to kill or witness family members being murdered, attack their own villages, and so on (Honwana, 2006, pp. 49, 61).

Even more gruesomely, Singer (2005, p. 74) describes how children in Colombia, the DRC, Peru and Mozambique are sometimes required to take part in the ritual cannibalism of their victims. There have also been reports of cannibalism in Ituri, the region that the UPC aimed to control (ICC's legal landmark; Thomas Lubanga found guilty of using child soldiers to rape, murder, 15.3.2012). In other cases, children are forced to drink the blood of their victims to make them fearless, avoid feelings of regret and avoid the haunting of the spirits of persons they may kill (Honwana, 2006, p. 61–62).

To former child soldiers the act of murder is usually the experience that completely changes their lives; morally, it represents the ultimate line, which now crossed, that separates their previous lives from their new lives as part of the armed group. Traumatized by the initiation process, the children could finally be remade in its image. This process may be so binding that the children never might want to leave. (See e.g. Singer, 2005, pp. 72, 88–89.)

#### **2.4.1 Political and ideological indoctrination**

Indoctrination means to make a child (or any civilian) adopt “the new worldview of a soldier” (Singer, 2005, p. 70). The indoctrination strategy of an armed group varies depending on the group, but it often involves the separation between ‘us’ (those who are part of the armed group) and ‘them’ (those who are in opposition to the armed group) (ibid., p. 72). Social psychological theory has made great strides in attempting to understand the processes involved in intergroup behavior. Tajfel and Turner's (1986) Social Identity Theory (SIT) could help explain how a child soldier begins to identify with an armed group even if forcibly abducted. The theorists differentiate between an individual's personal and social identity. The former refers to an individual's unique characteristics, e.g. personality, looks and intellectuality (Brown and Turner, 1985), while the latter, prominent in SIT, defines an individual's membership in a



social category, such as an armed group. For one's social identity to be salient a person has to first identify him- or herself with a group and distinguish the characteristics of the in-group from those of out-groups. (Tajfel & Turner, 1986.) In the case of children who join an armed group voluntarily for ideological motives, it could be assumed that they, to some extent, already identify with the armed group and its cause. This would not be the case for abducted children. Even so, it is possible that the longer the forcibly recruited children are part of an armed group, during which they are continually subjected to initiation and indoctrination and are forbidden to leave the group or interact with other out-group members, the more they start identifying with the group. In fact, Tajfel and Turner (1986) found that the mere existence of an out-group (in this case the opposing armed group) is sufficient to elicit intergroup discrimination and in-group favoritism. This seems to have been the case with some former RUF child soldiers, who initially considered the RUF as their enemy but eventually began to adopt the RUF's values, aims and convictions until they perceived themselves to be RUF soldiers (Denov, 2010, pp. 142–144.)

The other main aspect of indoctrination involves the dehumanization of the enemy, which, according to Bandura (1999, p. 200), meant to view the enemy as inhuman and even to attribute demonic or animalistic qualities to them. For him dehumanizing the enemy is part of a larger process of transforming an individual into a combatant. If individuals view their behavior as more favorable than that of their enemies, in that they see themselves as fighting for a good cause, against their oppressors, etc., this goes a long way to morally justifying their violent behavior. (Bandura, 1999, pp. 195–196.) Lectures and war songs that promote fighting for freedom and justice against a corrupt government are employed for this very purpose, and being that the child soldiers are on the side of the right, they may be promised political, social and financial rewards when their group takes power. (Denov, 2010, pp. 101–112; see also Bjørkhaug, 2010, p. 15). Beyond morally justifying violence, the practice of further dehumanizing the enemy minimizes individuals' distress and self-censure, thus making it easier for them to commit atrocities (Bandura, 1999, p. 200).

### **2.4.2 Suppression of negative emotions**

In many armed forces children are forced to suppress negative emotions, like sadness, fear and guilt and instead show positive emotions. In Trenholm et al's study (2013, p. 214) of former child soldiers in the DRC, for example, the participants recount that they had to hide their feelings of fear, since fear was perceived as a sign of weakness. They were not allowed to cry even when being beaten. Violating the prohibition against showing emotions was even punishable by death. (Ibid., p. 214.) Similarly, in the RUF, children had to suppress feelings of sorrow and shame following battle and instead show positive feelings and celebrate acts of viciousness. (Maclure & Denov, 2006, p. 126.) Similar accounts are given by participants in Honwana's (2006, p. 65) study. Nevertheless, children find moments when they can cry in secret (see e.g. Denov, 2010, pp. 129–130).

### **2.4.3 Drugs**

Drugs are used by some armed groups to make children forget their past, make them insensitive to violence and enhance their confidence (see e.g. Honwana, 2006, p. 59) as well as generate feelings of power and enable them to fight more efficiently in combat (see e.g. Denov, 2010, p. 100). Children in the UPC have been reported to be drugged (ICC's legal landmark; Thomas Lubanga found guilty of using child soldiers to rape, murder, 15.3.2012), as have children in the RUF (Denov, 2010 p. 100; Singer, 2005, 81), and former child soldiers in Angola and Mozambique<sup>18</sup> (Honwana, 2006, pp. 59, 62). In addition, children are sometimes given concoctions by traditional healers in order to make them courageous in battle (Honwana, 2006, p. 62), suppress their anxiety and protect them in combat (Trenholm et al., 2013, p. 212). Children might also themselves choose to use drugs in order to escape reality and enable them to wreak havoc (ibid., p. 212). A drug reported to be used in Eastern Africa, in particular, is khat (Singer, 2005, p. 81). In some armed forces (e.g. the FMLN and FARC) alcohol and drugs have

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<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, Denov (2010, p. 100) and Singer (2005, p. 82) for former child soldiers' quotes on the effects of taking drugs (e.g. feeling stronger, more confident, and able to do anything). Children who have been part of armed groups in Asia also recount using drugs despite the prohibition of drugs in some armed groups (see e.g. UNICEF, 2002, p. 42)

instead been prohibited, and under certain conditions punishable by death as in the FARC (Dickson-Gómez, 2003, pp. 344, 352).

## ***2.5 Training and roles in the armed force***

Once recruited, many children begin their military service with more supportive tasks such as serving as guard duty, cooks and porters (Machel, 2001, pp. 12–13). Other children also serve as bodyguards for army officers (Children Rights Project and Human Rights Watch, 1994, p. 16), steal food, serve as couriers (Machel, 2001, p. 13) or spies (Brett & McCallin, 1996, pp. 125–126). Often children perform many such roles simultaneously (Denov, 2010, p. 108). One former SPLA child soldier served as an instructor at two SPLA schools for “unaccompanied boys”, but had also taken part in combat (Ensor, 2012, p. 279). Children of both genders are frequently forced to provide sexual services (Machel, 2001, 13). Machel (2001, p. 13) states that almost all abducted girls are made into sexual slaves<sup>19</sup>. There are numerous other roles and tasks not mentioned here, see, for instance, Denov (2010, pp. 108–109); UNICEF (2002, pp. 44–47). In some cases supportive roles may be the only tasks that the children are allowed to do. Nevertheless, most children have been recruited for the purpose of combat and receive some kind of training for this. (Singer, 2005, p. 75.)

In reference to a global survey, Singer (2005, pp. 77, 79) states that 91% of all child soldiers had taken part in battle. Usually children are briefly taught how to use and clean arms, plant land mines and set ambushes. The duration and quality of the training varies, though. In general, rebel groups train children for a shorter amount of time and in a less formal (institutionalized) way than, for instance, state armies. Some children are trained only for a day, while others are trained for months. (Ibid.) Despite their age, all unaccompanied boys in the SPLA camps in Ethiopia received some sort of military training. Older boys, however, received full time military training during three to four months, while younger boys were trained only during school holidays. (Children Rights Project and Human Rights Watch, 1994, p. 16.)

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<sup>19</sup> For more information on girls’ experiences of sexual exploitation see e.g. Betancourt et al. (2008); Denov (2010); Denov & Maclure (2007); Honwana (2006); Mazurana et al. (2002); McKay (2005). For a different example, where forced sexual relations have been prohibited, see Veale (2005).

Although children may be reluctant to become combatants at first, they may be rewarded for it by being beaten and violated less, etc. They also receive more “power” when they have a gun. (Veale & Stavrou, 2007, p. 284.) This topic will be treated in more detail in section 2.7. Activities that child soldiers partake in during combat are looting, burning of houses and villages, kidnappings, beatings, mutilations, torture, assassinations, rapes and frontline battle (see e.g. Denov, 2010, p. 110; UNICEF, 2002, pp. 40, 43).

## ***2.6 Promotions***

Children who do well might receive rewards or be promoted within the ranks of an armed group. This serves the purpose of making children even more dedicated to the armed group. This was the case in the RUF, where children who behaved extremely violently in attacks were appreciated (the more violent the behavior the better) and would get certain licenses, such as, accessibility to foodstuff and raided items. (Denov, 2010, pp. 112–114.) Referring to Singer’s statement in the previous section children would occasionally even be promoted as commanders over other children, as one participant had been after carrying out amputations and acting courageously in combat (ibid., p. 113). Being a commander was a cause of pride; one was also given bodyguards and had sexual license over females (see e.g. Denov & Maclure, 2007, p. 253). Child soldiers in Colombia received specialized training (e.g. political training or training in how to use more specialized weapons/explosives) after doing well in combat. These children become privileged because they receive better protection than others and, for instance, do not have to take part in battle so frequently anymore. (Bjørkhaug, 2010, p. 18.)

## ***2.7 Normality, skill, status, and power***

Gradually some children come to perceive killing as a normal aspect of life (Denov, 2010, p. 126). One former child soldier from Papua New Guinea mentions how killing did not affect him after some time, that it was part of his duty (UNICEF, 2002, p. 54). This transformation is possible, through the “routinization” of violence. According to Kelman (1995, pp. 30–31) being trained, socialized and indoctrinated into committing extreme acts of violence transforms regular individuals, so that they begin to perceive their actions as routine or as part of their profession. According to Bandura (1999, p. 195) moral disengagement may occur

without the person at first even noticing the transformations they are experiencing. In the beginning the actions they partake in may be less aggressive and more bearable. Their self-condemnation is reduced when they repeatedly commit the same acts and, in the end, they are able to commit acts they initially considered as horrible with barely any distress. (Ibid., pp. 195, 203.)

Some children even start perceiving the violent acts and the killings as something enjoyable and exciting akin to a game or a skill to be proud of (Denov, 2010, p. 129). Kelman (1995, p. 31) concurs; when violence becomes normal, the perpetrator does not perceive the violent acts as cruel but as their job – a job that requires special skills and knowledge and can become a source of pride. Other child soldiers begin to associate a soldier's position and access to a gun with power and status (Denov, 2010, p. 131). One former Congolese child soldier mentions that a soldier is "*the master of the world, having the right to life and death over people*" (Trenholm et al., 2013, p. 215). Similar examples are given by former RUF child soldiers, for example: "*I always felt powerful with my gun....When you have a gun, you can force anyone to do anything for you.*" (Maclure & Denov, 2006, p. 129).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that killing is not considered normal or exciting by all children. One former child soldier describes feeling sorry and another one feeling bad at the sight of seeing someone die. For a third child, witnessing people being killed feels like human life lost its value. (UNICEF, 2002, p. 55.) Other children disapprove of the soldiers' behaviors (see e.g. Denov, 2010, p. 142; Honwana, 2006, p. 68). Neither do all children identify with the soldiers; though some may pretend to in order to ensure their safety or survive (Denov, 2010, pp. 140–142). Others also resist the system they are part of in various ways (see e.g. Denov, 2010, pp. 133–144). They might, for instance, risk their own lives and disobey orders by showing mercy on a civilian that they were supposed to kill (e.g. Honwana, 2006, p. 65; War Child, 2007, p. 300.009), deliberately not aim well when firing and let the victims survive<sup>20</sup> (e.g. Denov, 2010, p. 142), pretend not to understand orders (Honwana, 2006, p. 68), refuse to rape (e.g. UNICEF, 2002, p. 45), and attempt to or, in fact, escape, etc. (e.g. Singer, 2005, p. 92). It is, however, important to bear in mind that, although some children start identifying themselves

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<sup>20</sup> Some do not know whether they actually killed someone because they used to fight at night (e.g. UNICEF, 2002, p. 53).

with the soldiers and commit atrocities, they are often, at the same time, ruthlessly victimized (Denov, 2010, p. 144).

## ***2.8 Exiting an armed group***

Concerning the exit out of an armed group, some children escape (e.g. Bjørkhaug, 2010, p. 20; Denov, 2010, pp. 146–147) or leave the armed group under other conditions, such as, being the sole survivor in an attack (Denov, 2010, p. 148), being sent home or injured (Peters & Richards, 1998, p. 195) or being captured by the enemy (Bjørkhaug, 2010, p. 20). For instance, many former SPLA child soldiers fled to Kakuma refugee camp in neighboring Kenya due to the Sudanese government taking over a nearby town; very few boys who served in the “Red Army” were reunited with their families (Rone, 1995, p. 55; Children Rights Project and Human Rights Watch, 1994, pp. 16, 19). Other children are freed by UN troops (Denov, 2010, p. 147) or local nongovernmental organizations (Johannessen & Holgersen, 2013, p. 56). Those who manage to escape may have to cross enemy territory and live in fear of being discovered and killed by the enemy or the armed group they have just escaped (Denov, 2010, pp. 146–147). For abducted children, such as many of the participants in Denov’s (ibid.) study, the way out of the armed group may be just as sudden as their abduction. Within a short amount of time they experience a sudden separation from the military context they were in and enter into a new social context to which they have to re-adapt (ibid.). In the subsequent sections, I will present results from studies on former child soldiers’ reintegration into civil society.

## ***2.9 Reintegration to civil society***

Studies (e.g. Denov, 2010; Honwana, 2006; Johannessen & Holgersen, 2013; Veale, 2005) show that child soldiers’ reintegration into civil society is a challenging process. Many children have been part of a highly militarized group, which by definition is hierarchical and violent. They have had to obey rules (contrary to having to think independently), while others might also have been in the position to give orders. (Denov, 2010, p. 149.) Several children have spent years in an armed force separated from their families and have been left without a chance to develop physically, emotionally and educationally (Machel, 2001, pp. 18–20). Some may have forgotten their previous lives as civilians or have never even known this way of life if they were

very young at the time of recruitment or were born into the armed group<sup>21</sup> (Denov, 2010, p. 151; Veale, 2005, pp. 114–115). As mentioned in the section above, children may have adopted the militaristic norms and values of the armed group, which are opposite to civilian ones. So, when they return to (or first enter) civil society they have to adopt a new set of civilian (non-militaristic) norms and values and develop new relationships. As a result of this transition, they often experience various losses and a combination of both negative and positive emotions. Contrary to the communal life in the armed force, they are often left on their own to cope with these novel circumstances in their lives. (Denov, 2010, pp. 145–179; Denov & Maclure, 2007; Honwana, 2006; Veale, 2005.) It is, however, important to note that the effects of having been a child soldier vary depending on the amount of time spent in an armed group, the type of recruitment, the experiences in the armed force and the support a child received while in the armed group as well as the support they receive upon their return to civil society (Wessells, 2009, p. 587). Thus, the reader has to remember that the experiences raised in this section do not apply to all former child soldiers but are examples from former child soldiers who have served in different armed groups.

### **2.9.1 The experience of loss and the (lack of) expression of aggression**

Some of the losses that former child soldiers experience upon exiting an armed group are the loss of important friendships and a “sense of belonging” (Denov, 2010, pp. 145–146, 150–151; Veale, 2005, pp. 114–115). For example, the participants in Veale’s (2005, p. 114) study reported that they missed, not only the social life in the TPLF and the relations they had had with other combatants, but also the sense of a collective objective. For a few children, it even symbolized a loss of family. As a consequence of this transition, former child soldiers may feel lonely and isolated. (e.g. Denov, 2010, p. 151; Veale, 2005, pp. 114–115.) For children who have carried arms, the transition to civilian life may symbolize the loss of power and security

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<sup>21</sup> One participant in Denov’s (2010, p. 151) study was around four years old at the time of recruitment. She had grown up in the RUF and saw the members of the armed group as her family. She mentions that the only behavior familiar to her was that of the RUF. (Ibid., p. 151.) Veale (2005, pp. 114–115) describes a similar case.

that carrying a gun provided, a great challenge to overcome. Some children experience a struggle with their sense of self and continue to see themselves as soldiers. (Denov, 2010, pp. 145, 151.)

Even after returning to civil society, a number of former child soldiers continue to behave according to the norms and values of the armed forces of which they were a part. One Sierra Leonean former child soldier who took part in a Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration program<sup>22</sup>, for instance, mentions how she and several other ex-combatants became annoyed when they did not receive their financial benefit on time. As a result, they acted the way they had been taught in the RUF: they took drugs and physically attacked the DDR staff members. (Denov, 2010, p. 152.) Another former LRA child soldier tells how she gets easily irritated and then “feels like killing somebody” (McKay, 2005, p. 392). Staff members working with former child soldiers in the eastern DRC mention that former child soldiers continue to act aggressively in the care/transit centers (Johannessen & Holgersen, 2013, pp. 60, 62.) For similar examples by former FMLN child soldiers, see Dickson-Gómez (2003, p. 345).

Boyden (2003, pp. 352–353) discusses the view that several researchers hold in relation to the moral development of child soldiers. According to them (e.g. Garbarino, Kostelny & Dubrow, 1991, p. 16), the effects of children’s participation in combat damages their development and results in increased aggression, etc. Boyden (2003, pp. 352–353, 359), nevertheless, refers to the results of some other studies which are not so clear-cut. Although they do not exclude the negative effects that war has on children’s morality, Boyden points out that former combatants are not immoral or incapable of, for instance, being respectful towards others (ibid., pp. 352–353, 359). So while some former child soldiers may act aggressively upon their return to civil society, this does not apply to everyone. Former LRA child soldiers in Annan et al.’s (2009, pp. 653–655) study, for example, mention that they did not even respond when people insulted them because it brought back bad memories, or they were just too weak or wounded to fight back, etc. Some even began to cry (ibid.). These cases of former LRA child soldiers’ passive reactions to insults supports Boyden’s view. Denov’s (2012, p. 289) findings also challenges the mainstream view, which holds that former child soldiers continue to

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<sup>22</sup> For more information about these processes and programs see e.g. Denov (2010, pp. 154–155); Machel (2001, p. 14). None of the participants in my study mentioned having partaken in any formal DDR programs when they returned to civilian life.



participate in violence following the end of their military involvement. Instead, the participants in her study are politically active and have created ways to support themselves through motorbike taxi-driving (ibid., p. 289). Former SPLA child soldiers have also attained leadership roles in the aftermath of war and, in addition, shown to be more active in politics than those who did not partake in hostilities (Ensor, 2012, p. 282). Similar examples are given by former child soldiers in Asia (see UNICEF, 2002, pp. 68–69).

### **2.9.2 Emotional, psychological and physical health issues**

While many former child soldiers experience positive emotions upon leaving an armed force, they also experience a vast variety of negative emotions (e.g. Denov, 2010, pp. 145, 150). They may, for instance, fear being re-recruited or killed by the armed group they were once a part of (ibid., pp. 146–147; Annan et al., 2009, p. 649) or fear being hurt by those who look negatively upon former child soldiers (Denov & Maclure, 2007, p. 252; Honwana, 2006, p. 143). Others experience disappointment and feelings of betrayal when they do not receive what they were promised by the armed group, which was the case for former FMLN child soldiers in Dickson-Gómez's (2003, pp. 343–344) study who had believed in the *guerrilla*'s revolutionary ideology. Children from this same study (ibid., pp. 338–339) also expressed resentment towards their caretakers for having to take on adult responsibilities as children. Former child soldiers have also been reported to have experienced nervousness, anger and anxiety (Santacruz & Arana, 2002, p. 12); helplessness, confusion, apathy and emotional numbness (Protacio-De Castro, 2001, p. 7–8); guilt for the atrocities they have committed (Denov, 2010; pp. 152–153); guilt for having survived the war while their relatives did not (Honwana, 2006, p. 143); shame<sup>23</sup> (e.g. Mazurana et al., 2002, p. 115); regret and hopelessness (e.g. Johannessen & Holgersen, 2013, p. 61). Besides the emotional issues former child soldiers face, a number of psychological and cognitive issues also have arisen.

While one former FMLN child soldier was still not able to recall the traumatizing event of his father being murdered (Dickson-Gómez, 2003, pp. 338–339, 341), others have recurring

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<sup>23</sup> See also Mazurana et al (2002, p. 115) for the effects of sexual violence on girls (e.g. shame, loss of self-respect, low self-esteem etc.).

memories of violence (Denov, 2010, p. 150; Santacruz & Arana, 2002, p. 12). Other difficulties that former child soldiers might experience are problems concentrating (Mazurana et al., 2002, p. 115), insomnia (e.g. Johannessen & Holgersen, 2013, p. 61; Santacruz & Arana, 2002, p. 12), depression (ibid., 2002, p. 12), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)<sup>24</sup>, hallucinations and nightmares (Johannessen & Holgersen, 2013, p. 61) or psychosis (e.g. Somasundaram, 2002, p. 1270). Some may also isolate themselves or attempt to commit suicide (see e.g. Johannessen & Holgersen, 2013, p. 61; Dickson-Gómez, 2003, pp. 347–348).

Some physical health-related problems that former child soldiers suffer from are sexually transmitted diseases (e.g. Mazurana et al., 2002, p. 113), stomachaches, urinary tract infections, bed wettings or permanent injuries, such as the loss of a limb (Johannessen & Holgersen, 2013, p. 59, 61). The participants in Santacruz and Arana's (2002, p. 13) study listed being permanently wounded or injured in combat as the second worst experience during the war. Some former child soldiers continue to be addicted to drugs they abused during their time in the armed force; their various addictions cause them to e.g. act aggressively (Johannessen & Holgersen, 2013, p. 60). Certain former FMLN child soldiers, instead, began abusing drugs and alcohol once having exited the *guerrilla*, where it had been prohibited (Dickson-Gómez, 2003, pp. 344, 346, 348).

### 2.9.3 Stigmatization

Stigmatization of former child soldiers has also been documented in many studies (e.g. Betancourt et. al., 2010, p. 24; Dickson-Gómez, 2003, p. 345; Johannessen & Holgersen, 2013, p. 61; Wessells, 2009, p. 588)<sup>25</sup>. Some are seen as thieves, killers and/or rapists. For example,

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<sup>24</sup> PTSD is “characterised by exposure to an extremely stressful or catastrophic event or situation followed by three symptom clusters. These include repeated reliving of the trauma, e.g., through intrusive images or dreams of the event or monotonous re-enactment of the traumatic events through play in young children; hyperarousal, e.g., increased vigilance or disturbed sleep; as well as persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness... PTSD symptoms have been found following exposure to war and organised violence in children and adolescents from many different parts of the world” (Kimberly, Ehntholt & Yule, 2006, p. 1198).

<sup>25</sup> For stigmas that former female child soldiers face, in particular, see e.g. Mazurana et al. (2002); McKay (2005); Denov & Maclure (2007); Honwana (2006); Johannessen & Holgersen (2013); Veale & Stavrou (2007) and, Veale (2005), for a different kind of study.

in the eastern DRC former child soldiers have been socially rejected by their local communities, families and friends. The cause for this rejection may be that the child took part in looting or raping village girls or was forced to kill his or her own family members or neighbors. Other causes for rejecting the child were family poverty or simple abandonment of the child. (Johannessen & Holgersen, 2013, p. 61.) Other studies show similar findings (e.g. Betancourt et. al., 2010; Corbin, 2008). Former child soldiers are also isolated or feared for their behavior (Corbin, 2008; Wessells, 2009, p. 588). As a consequence they might have no friends (Betancourt et. al., 2010, p. 24), be stigmatized in school (UNICEF, 2002, pp. 68–69) or by neighbors, employers and society in general (Thomas, 2008, pp. 30–31). Making a mistake may also automatically be attributed to their background as a soldier (Betancourt et al., 2010, p. 24). Fear of stigmatization may lead some former child soldiers not to reveal their past nor return to their home villages<sup>26</sup> (Denov, 2010, pp. 164–166.)

Some studies (e.g. Veale & Stavrou, 2007) show that the longer a child has been affiliated with an armed force, the more discrimination they experience when re-adapting to civil society. It is, nevertheless, important to note that while former child soldiers experience stigma, they may also be warmly welcomed home by the family who feared that they were already dead. On occasion, they experience both a warm welcome home by their families but are stigmatized by community at large. The way they are treated may also change depending on the context (e.g. if they get angry, people are likely to associate their emotional reaction to their military background). (Ibid., pp. 286–287.) Not all child soldiers are, however, perceived negatively. In southern Sudan, for instance, former child soldiers may be perceived as heroic upon their return to civil society (Fegley, 2008, pp. 47–48).

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<sup>26</sup> Besides being stigmatized, former child soldiers who live in refugee camps or camps for Internally Displaced Persons may lack clean water, food and health care (e.g. Lustig et al.). Lack of activities (such as no possibility to earn an income or get an education) and dependency of international organizations has also been reported (Annan et al., 2009; Corbin, 2008).

#### **2.9.4 Family and community acceptance, forgiveness and education**

Although former child soldiers have been described to be incurable in the media, this standpoint is not correct<sup>27</sup>. The majority of former child soldiers are, actually, resilient and deal with their current circumstances in a positive manner. (Wessells, 2009, p. 588; see also UNICEF, 2002, p. 67–68.) Some factors, however, greatly assist former child soldiers' reintegration into civil society such as being reunited with and accepted by families and communities (Betancourt et al., 2010, p. 24; Corbin, 2008; Hill and Langholtz, 2003, p. 282). Family relationships and friendships can help former child soldiers gain confidence with beginning and maintaining other social relations as well as deal with memories (e.g. Annan et al., 2009, pp. 657–658; Betancourt et al., 2008, p. 9, 11–12; Kryger & Lindgren, 2011, p. 11; Santacruz & Arana, 2002, pp. 14, 16). Being friends with someone who has gone through similar experiences can also be beneficial (Annan et al., 2009, p. 663).

Not all children have a family to return to, though, since their family members have died during the war. The loss of family has an extremely negative impact on former child soldiers' reintegration and healing processes. (Hill & Langholtz, 2003, p. 280.) According to Santacruz and Arana (2002, p. 13), the participants listed the death of a family member or other important persons as their worst experience during the war. Children who have lost their parents are sometimes placed in foster care (see e.g. Thomas, 2008, p. 19). Many are also at risk to be re-recruited into an armed group or become street children (Hill & Langholtz, 2003, p. 280). Some children have lost their homes when their villages were destroyed during the war. These children join their larger community in struggling to satisfy their basic needs. (Honwana, 2006, p. 140.) Denov's (2012, p. 124) study shows that homelessness and its attendant effects (e.g. lack of basic needs, lack of education, and so on) is a problem amongst former child soldiers in Sierra Leone.

As mentioned above, the atrocities that former child soldiers have committed can sometimes stand in the way of social inclusion. In some cultural settings, former child soldiers undergo traditional cleansing rituals, whereby they are released from whatever they did in the armed force and are welcomed back to the community (e.g. Annan et al., 2009, p. 660; Corbin,

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<sup>27</sup> See Annan, Brier & Aryemo (2009, p. 640) for more on this issue.

2008, pp. 324–325; Fegley, 2008, p. 48; Honwana, 2006, pp. 104–134). Overall, reconciliation and forgiveness are highly significant factors in facilitating former child soldiers reintegration into civil society (see e.g. Betancourt et al., 2008, pp. 8–9; Denov, 2010, p. 153).

A great many former child soldiers have been deprived of certain possibilities, such as getting an education (a fact they are very sad about<sup>28</sup>) or gaining skills that they would have otherwise acquired, had they not been part of an armed force (e.g. Betancourt et al., 2008; Honwana, 2006, pp. 136, 143; Wessells, 2009, p. 588). Educational deprivation may cause difficulties for them to return to school because they lack the skills that children of their age already have acquired (Hill & Langholtz, 2003, p. 280). For example, many participants in Santacruz and Arana's (2002, p. 9) study had not received much education prior to joining the FMLN, and they continued to be marginalized in terms of education following the end of war, which effected their other living conditions (e.g. occupational opportunities, economy). Former FMLN child soldiers in Dickson-Gómez's (2003) study had e.g. not been taught farming skills, nor skills for living everyday life. After the end of war, they were not ready to assume a child's role any longer since they had had adult responsibilities in the war. Some became involved in theft and used the money they had received as assistance on alcohol, tobacco and marijuana instead of using it for farming as intended. One participant describes it as a result of them being traumatized and not having received education or adequate working skills. The grave financial adversity and insecurity they experienced made it difficult for them to find meaning in their adult lives. (Ibid.) Denov's (2012, p. 125) study also shows that Sierra Leonean former child soldiers have difficulties in finding employment for longer periods of time. Some of the legal and illegal means by which some of them sustain themselves are through theft and prostitution (ibid., p.125). Therefore, other kinds of assistance, such as providing an education (e.g. Betancourt et al., 2008, pp. 8–9, 13), career training and counseling (e.g. Johannessen & Holgersen, 2013, pp. 62–63) as well as partaking in creative activities (e.g. theatrical performances, arts, music) (e.g. Hill & Langholtz, 2003, p. 282) have proven to be a substantial advantage for former child soldiers. Attending school can, for instance, have many positive outcomes for former child soldiers' self-development (e.g. improved self-confidence and self-

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<sup>28</sup> Several former child soldiers in Annan et al.'s (2009, p. 650) study mention the loss of education as what has affected their lives the most.

esteem) and for building friendships (although, school can also be a place where children are stigmatized) (Betancourt et al., 2008, p. 9; Hill & Langholtz, 2003, p. 283; Kryger & Lindgren, 2011, p. 13). Other noteworthy factors that have contributed positively to the transition from military to civil society include listening to what the children and youth have on their minds (Johannessen & Holgersen, 2013, pp. 62–63.) and having faith in God (Annan et al., 2009, pp. 660–662; Kryger & Lindgren, 2011, p. 14). We will now turn to the experiences of former child soldiers and refugees who have left their home countries and settled in the West.

### ***2.10 Studies of refugees and immigrants in acculturation***

As mentioned in the introduction, some children, who have been forced to leave their home countries as refugees<sup>29</sup> or asylum seekers<sup>30</sup> have also previously served as child soldiers (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008, pp. 321–323). The traumatic experiences they have undergone could be classified as human rights violations (HRVs), such as death threats, exposure to hostile environments, and torture. (Allen, Vaage & Hauff, 2006, p. 198.) According to Silove (1999) HRVs affect the following five “systems” central to an individual: “safety”, “attachment”, “justice”, “identity-role” and “existential-meaning”. Firstly, HRVs impact an individual’s “safety” in a negative way due to the threats they have perceived. Secondly, the fact that they have experienced multiple losses affects their inter-personal relationships, especially in regards to “attachment”. Their perception of “justice” has also been negatively affected by the injustices they have faced without these being addressed. One of the main goals of violating human rights is to destabilize individuals’ identity and autonomy (“identity-role”). Because of the cruelty they have faced, they also lose faith in humanity and question the meaning of life (“existential-meaning”). (Ibid.) This supports Lustig et al.’s (2004, p. 26) finding that child soldiers

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<sup>29</sup> The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol defines a refugee as “a person who is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail him- or herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution” (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [hereafter, UNHCR], 2011, p. 3).

<sup>30</sup> The legal difference between refugees and asylum seekers is that refugees have been approved asylum prior to arriving to the host country, while asylum seekers have to apply for asylum upon arrival to the host country (UNHCR, 2000, pp. 4-5)

experience loss of trust in “authority figures” (e.g. parents and commanding officers) because of their inability to provide for the children’s essential needs or for their perpetration of violence.

Some of the experiences that refugees undergo upon entering a new environment, such as loss of home, family and other social relationships, material possessions (Allen et al., 2006, p. 207), familiar surroundings, school (Ajdukovic & Ajdukovic, 1998, p. 187) and cultural norms (Williams & Berry, 1991, p. 634), have already been experienced by many former child soldiers as we saw in the previous sections<sup>31</sup>. In fact, former child soldiers might experience some of these losses a second time if they have already returned to their families and communities for some time prior to fleeing to another country.

Besides traumatic experiences in their home countries (such as being a child soldier), refugees may also experience difficulties while fleeing to the host country (such as risk of being captured, exploited in various ways, injured, being deprived of food, having to endure physical difficulties, and so on) (Allen et al., 2006, pp. 207–208; see also Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008, pp. 321–322). Upon arriving to a host country, refugees might be relieved, hopeful and happy about having left behind a difficult past, but they often soon realize that they face various challenges in the new host society (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008, p. 322). These challenges may relate to the process of seeking asylum, the living conditions in the host country (Ehnholt & Yule, 2006, p. 1197) and the acculturation process, that process of cultural and psychological change that occurs as a result of cross-cultural contact<sup>32</sup> (Sam & Berry, 2010, p. 472). Refugees

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<sup>31</sup> One could argue that going from civilian life to an armed force and back to civilian life is a double cultural change. These changes are obviously different from the socio-cultural change they, as refugees, experience when entering a new country where they might even differ from the majority of the population in relation to language and appearance.

<sup>32</sup> Acculturation takes place at two levels. At the group-level changes occur in the culture of the group (e.g. the group’s social, economic or political position), while at the individual level changes occur in the individual’s values, attitudes, behavior and identity (Williams & Berry, 1991, p. 633). Individual level acculturation is also called *psychological acculturation* (Graves, 1967). Psychological acculturation results in *psychological adaptation* (e.g. influencing the individual’s self-perception and self-esteem, mental well-being and life satisfaction) and *socio-cultural adaptation* (e.g. influencing the development of relationships and the capacity to function in daily life, for instance, in school) (Allen, Vaage & Hauff, 2006, p. 206; Berry, 1997, p. 14).

have to deal with a new culture and language<sup>33</sup> (Berry, 1991; Lustig et al., 2004, p. 27) as well as a new set of social structures, such as school system in regards to minors (Sam, 2006, p. 405).

Referring to Silove's (1999) framework above, Allen et al. (2006) have adapted and linked it to acculturation theory. They demonstrate how the acculturation processes affect some of the same areas as the framework ("attachment system", "identity/role system" and "existential-meaning system") and helps understand how refugees who have undergone HRVs function, adapt and resettle into a new country. Berry (1991, ref. Allen et al., p. 208) states that refugees are marginalized during the claimant period (the stage when asylum seekers apply for refuge) since they do not acquire the same legal rights and benefits as the rest of society. The involuntary nature of refugees' migration has already shown to have a negative impact on the acculturation process, in that it increases individuals' difficulties in adapting psychologically (Kim, 1988, ref. Berry, 2006, p. 49). Being forced to migrate and then being marginalized in the country of reception increases the risk of acculturative stress in asylum seekers, as does the uncertainty of not knowing whether they will acquire a permanent residence permit or not<sup>34</sup> (Allen et al., 2006, pp. 205, 208). Acculturative stress refers to the amount of stress experienced in reaction to acculturation (Sam & Berry, 2010, pp. 472–474) and can result in "anxiety, depression, feelings of marginality and alienation, heightened psychosomatic symptoms, and identity confusion" (Williams & Berry, 1991, p. 634). This stress in combination with refugees' experiences of traumatic events may amplify the symptoms of trauma (Allen, Vaage & Hauff, 2006, p. 208). As a consequence of their uncertain future and difficulties in language acquisition, refugees might become conscious of the fact that they may not be able to fulfill the dreams, plans and responsibilities they had upon arriving to the host country (Derluyn et al., 2005).

Those that are (or have been) granted asylum enter into a resettlement stage, during which the acculturative strategy of the host country and the individual's acculturation strategy influence the process of acculturation (Allen et al., p. 208). Immigrants can adopt four

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<sup>33</sup> Difficulties in acquiring and using the host country's language has shown to have a negative impact on immigrants' life satisfaction, since it reduces their capability of functioning efficiently in the new context (Ying, 1996).

<sup>34</sup> For unaccompanied minors, being dependent in daily life and in regards to their future prospects is contrary to their earlier experience of having to be independent in order to survive the various difficulties they underwent (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008, p. 322).



acculturation strategies (or attitudes) within the host society, namely “integration” (maintaining one’s original culture *as well as* interacting with other groups), “assimilation” (*not* maintaining one’s original culture but only interacting with other groups), “separation” (maintaining one’s own culture while avoiding interaction with other groups), and “marginalization” (lack of opportunity or interest to maintain one’s culture and to interact with other groups). Which acculturation strategy they adopt, however, depends on the majority’s acculturation expectations. For example, exclusion and discrimination<sup>35</sup> as well as imposed cultural loss tend to lead to marginalization. In general, integration has been found to be the most successful strategy and marginalization the least successful. (Sam & Berry, 2010, pp. 476–477.) Some other factors that impact the acculturation process are age and cultural distance. For instance, adolescents experience more difficulties in adapting to a new society compared to children under primary school age (see e.g. Aronowitz, 1992; Beiser et al., 1988). While the more dissimilarities there are between the culture of the individual and the culture of the host society (in terms of language and religion), that is, their cultural distance, the more negative the adaptation has shown to be (Berry, 2006, p. 50). Other conditions affecting both the psychological adaptation and the coping with HRVs is the quality of care (e.g. social services) that individuals receive in the host society. In order for them to adapt successfully at a psychological level they have to deal with self-perception processes arising from cross-cultural contact and also cope with their traumas in various ways (e.g. through finding existential meaning) (Allen et al., 2006, p. 207.)

Another factor that has shown to act protectively both when coping with war and political violence as well as during resettlement is ideological commitment (Lustig et al., 2004, p. 28). Kanagaratnam, Raundalen and Asbjørnsen (2005), for instance, studied the amount of ideological commitment and post-traumatic stress in former Tamil child soldiers living in Norway. They particularly focused on the participants’ combat experiences and their reflections of these experiences. The results showed that participants with weak ideological commitment were more negatively affected by their participation in combat, while those with strong ideological commitment were less negatively affected by their involvement in combat. While

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<sup>35</sup> Research findings (e.g. Gil, Vega & Dimas, 1994; Phinney & Chavira, 1995) show that discrimination has a negative impact on the well-being of immigrant adolescents.

the majority of the participants experienced post-traumatic stress symptoms frequently, those who were more ideologically committed to a cause, however, had less symptoms of post-traumatic stress. (Ibid.) Ideological commitment has, however, shown to function less protectively when individuals are exposed to higher levels of war (Punamäki, 1996). This was the case also in Kanagaratnam et al.'s (2005, p. 518) study where participants with strong ideological commitment had not been exposed to the highest levels of war<sup>36</sup>.

As we have seen in this section, there are very few studies which focus exclusively on former child soldiers in exile; rather, they tend to be included in studies of refugees in general. However, it is of necessity to attempt to understand former child soldiers' experiences of living in the West in order to provide assistance which coincides better with their specific needs. Perhaps Allen et al.'s (2006) theoretical framework can help shed light on the way that former child soldiers cope with their traumas in relation to acculturation.

Researchers have argued that a qualitative approach<sup>37</sup> is most suitable for understanding the experiences and meanings of persons who have been affected by war (see e.g. Denov, 2010, pp. 87–88). The diverse and complex life experiences of the participants in my study and the under researched nature of my research topic requires me to remain open to what the participants themselves describe instead of using formal theories to categorize their experiences. In order to pursue this purpose, I have chosen to use Giorgi's (2009) phenomenological psychological approach which is also adaptable to social psychological research. It is to this approach we now turn.

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<sup>36</sup> Combat experiences that the whole sample rated as the worst were friends' deaths, killing of one's own people, blame for being accountable for unnecessary killings and facing moral conflicts (ibid., p. 516).

<sup>37</sup> According to Schwandt (2007, p. 100), "[q]ualitative inquiry deals with human lived experience. It is the lifeworld as it is lived, felt, undergone, made sense of, and accomplished by human beings that is the object of study". Thus, qualitative researchers study how human beings give meanings to phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3).

### 3 Theoretical Framework

#### 3.1 *The roots of Descriptive Phenomenological Psychology*

Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) founded the philosophical movement of phenomenology, which has had an impact on the human and social sciences (Giorgi, 2008, p. 33; Moran, 2000; Zahavi, 2008). Psychologist Amedeo Giorgi, who was the first to adapt Husserl’s philosophical ideas to fit within a scientific, psychological framework, in turn, initiated phenomenological psychology (Langridge, 2008, pp. 1130–1131; Giorgi, 2009). He (Giorgi, 2009, p. 121) developed a qualitative approach for studying “*the psychological meaning of [people’s] experiences via descriptions*”. For Giorgi (ibid., pp. 98, 113, 135), the term “psychological” refers to a non-theoretical perspective which focuses on the subjective meanings of human beings’ experiences of phenomena. Although Giorgi’s approach was developed for psychological studies, it is applicable to studies within social psychology and other social sciences (ibid.). I will return to this topic in section 3.2.4.

Today, there are various approaches within phenomenological psychology which have developed along different lines according to the ideas of phenomenological philosophers. Broadly, however, one could make a distinction among three camps, the strictly descriptive, the strictly interpretative, and those approaches that blend the two in varying degrees. (Langridge, 2008, pp. 1126, 1130–1131.) Giorgi (2006, pp. 314–315; 2009, pp. 126–127), though, criticizes the combination of both descriptive and interpretive methods since he considers this an impossibility. For him, an interpretative approach implies that one goes beyond the description by imposing interpretations (e.g. assumptions) on the description (ibid.). This goes against Husserl’s (1913/2004, pp. 100–101) main principle, according to which, one ought not to go beyond the boundaries of what is given (meaning, that which is presented in the description). Giorgi’s (1985; 2009) method is strictly Husserlian and, as such, descriptive. Despite differences in phenomenological approaches, all approaches emphasize the importance of human experiences (Smith, Flower and Larkin, 2009, p. 11; Langridge, 2008, p. 1128). In the following

sections, I will present those ideas of Husserl's that are necessary to grasp Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological psychology, which serves as the framework for my thesis.

### ***3.2 Giorgi's Descriptive Phenomenological Psychology***

#### **3.2.1 Consciousness, the experience of phenomena, and meaning**

Consciousness is central to Husserl's phenomenology (1911/2002, p. 28). According to him, all knowledge, including experiences, is dependent on consciousness, meaning that human beings can have no knowledge about anything without first being aware or *conscious* of it (Husserl, 1913/2002, p. 166; 1913/2004, pp. 100–101; 1929, p. 206). The primary aim of Husserl's (1929, p. 206) phenomenology is to comprehend the experience of how phenomena are presented to a person's consciousness from the perspective of the one who experienced it. Phenomena, here, may refer to "an object, a person, or a complex state of affairs" as presented to a person's consciousness (Giorgi, 2009, p. 4). The objects one is aware of may be real ("transcendent") or internal ("immanent") (Husserl, 1911/2002, pp. 48–49; 1913/2004, pp. 68–69, 100–101). To Husserl (1911/2002, pp. 39–48) real objects exist outside of consciousness and are limited by spatial, temporal and causal parameters (e.g. material objects). There are also those objects that are tied to a person's consciousness. These objects are experienced only by the one conscious of them; thus, they are internal. Emotions, imaginings and memories are examples of this latter type of object. (Giorgi, 1995.) Regardless of whether a person's experiences are of real or internal objects, these experiences, which are not limited by space, time or causality, are all dependent on consciousness (Husserl, 1911/2002, pp. 39–48.) At the same time, Husserl also makes a differentiation between an act of consciousness and an object (Husserl 1913/2004; 1913/2002).

For Husserl (1911/2002, p. 45; 1913/2004, pp. 121–123, 246, 249) human consciousness is always a *consciousness of* something (my own italics). That is, an act of consciousness is always directed toward an object whether real or internal. This relationship (as described by the phenomenologist doing the research) between an act of consciousness and an object is what Husserl referred to as "intentionality". It is the intentionality or directedness of an act of consciousness toward an object which reflects the meaning of that object. Consequently, the

meaning mirrors one's experience of the object. This meaning can be discovered and separated from the object through reflection. (Husserl, 1913/2004; 1913/2002.) As an example of the act of consciousness, the object and its meaning, let us say that I walk by a newspaper stand and become aware of (the act of consciousness) a magazine cover (the object) of a child with a gun. In this example, the object I am aware of is real, for it exists outside of my consciousness. Similarly, I could instead become aware of an internal object, such as a memory activated by the cover. (This would be akin to the case of the participants in my study whose memories are activated by my questions.) I can reflect on my experience of the magazine cover I saw later on at home. The meaning of my experience can, therefore, be recognized and repeatedly gone back to in order to be better understood. It is not dependent on me seeing the picture at that present moment. Following this example, my initial *perception* of the magazine cover constitutes the phenomenon; whereas the way that I actually experience the picture (or the memory it elicited) constitutes the meaning of the picture (or the memory).

For Husserl the only way to reach the meaning of a phenomenon is through intuition (Husserl, 1900/2000, p. 168). In Husserl's time, psychologists took a naturalistic view of consciousness which aimed at explaining it through causal principles, but Husserl (1911/2002) opposed this perspective. Instead, his advice is to put aside abstract systems of symbols like logic, which are insufficient for understanding a phenomenon's true nature, and "go back to the 'things themselves'" (Husserl, 1900/2000, p. 168), a statement that has had a great influence on philosophers and social scientific researchers. According to Giorgi (2009, p. 77) intuition, from a phenomenological point of view, is to "be present to". More precisely, one's consciousness "*intuit[s], that is, bring[s] objects to presence*" (Giorgi, 1995, p. 33). Perception as "the primal mode of intuition" is the primary means of going about this (Husserl, 1954/1970, p. 105); though there are also other modes of intuition such as imagining a phenomena and so on (ibid., p. 105; Giorgi, 1995, p. 31).

For the phenomenologist following the philosophical tradition this sort of research is a solitary practice; the focus is on one's *own* experience of a phenomenon, one's *own* description of that phenomenon as well the phenomenological procedures one uses to grasp and describe its essence and elucidate its invariable meaning. One of Giorgi's key modifications of Husserl's ideas is to discover the meanings that *other* people apply to their experiences of phenomena.

(Giorgi, 2009.) Thus, for researchers working within the framework of phenomenological psychology, Husserl's idea of "going back to the things themselves" implies one to go to human beings' concrete experiences of living in the world and study these experiences (Giorgi, 1985, p. 8), which requires the collecting of others' descriptions. The main objective of Giorgi's phenomenological psychology, then, is to capture a person's experience as authentically as possible, taking contextual factors into account (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008, p. 28). Any phenomenon that a human being is able to experience and describe can be a topic of a phenomenological psychological study (Giorgi, 2009, p. 211), including the complex experiences of having been a child soldier and having migrated to another country.

Before moving on to other relevant concepts for both Husserl's and Giorgi's approaches, I want to briefly explain my own perspective on some of the aforementioned issues. I concur with Husserl's and Giorgi's idea of consciousness, which is vital to understanding any human being's experience. Consciousness is always involved in our experience and in our knowledge, whether we are aware of it or not. I also consider people's perspectives on things to be subjective. Considering my study, for example, the participants all come from different home countries and have diverse experiences because they have been part of different armed groups and have come to Finland and Sweden in different ways. However, as a social psychologist I also believe that subjective experiences are inevitably tied to the collective and the social (Korkiakangas, 2006, p. 126). As human beings we are part of various groups and communities, which shape our understanding of things as well as our memories (ibid., p. 126). Experiences are also born in interaction and shared in interaction. People who have gone through a particular experience may find differences and similarities in the meanings they attribute to that experience. (Smith et al., 2009, p. 38.) The participants, for example, share some similar experiences in that they all have been part of an armed group and have experienced a socio-cultural change. These experiences may, in addition, be familiar to other child soldiers around the world and to children who have grown up in war zones in general, as well as to refugees. Thus, an experience is *both* subjective *and* social.

### **3.2.2 The life-world, time consciousness, and the natural attitude**

Husserl (1954/1970, pp. 103–189) also introduced the concept of “life-world”, which refers to the everyday life people lead in the world. For example, a person who has grown up under peaceful conditions might take peace for granted as part of their everyday life. The life-world also includes a spatial and a temporal dimension (Husserl, 1913/2004, pp. 103–189). Husserl’s perspective on human beings’ time consciousness, in particular, is vital to my study, since I focus on the participants past and present experiences as well as their future aspirations. To Husserl (1954/1970, pp. 168–169) a person’s perceptual experience can only include the present mode of temporality. One’s consciousness of the present, however, directs one’s attention towards the recent past, which Husserl (1954/1970, p.169) refers to as “a present which has passed”, and the immediate future, which he refers to as “a present-to-come”. This can be seen as a continuum of temporal modes. In order for a person to become conscious of and grasp the meaning of experiences which took place further back in time or consider the meaning of their long term future, they have to deliberately engage in recalling these memories or deliberately focus upon what they expect for the future. (Husserl 1954/1970, pp. 168–169.) Continuing with the previous example, a person who has experienced war would most likely be consciously aware of living under peaceful conditions at the present time because of his or her prior war experiences, especially if these experiences are more recent. Even if they are many years removed from the experiences of war a person can recall them, for instance, in an interview setting.

The life-world is also a taken for granted world, where things are simply assumed to exist (Husserl 1954/1970, p. 142). Husserl (*ibid.*, pp. 143–150) calls this taken for granted perspective the “natural attitude”. Following Giorgi’s (2009, pp. 95–112) approach, what is sought for in a study is that the participants describe their experiences as lived through, that is, from the natural attitude. In order to grasp and describe the essential features of a phenomenon one needs to go beyond the natural attitude and presume a “phenomenological attitude” (Husserl, 1913/2004). This procedure is described in more detail in the following section.

### 3.2.3 The phenomenological reduction, bracketing and Husserl's main principle

The “transcendental phenomenological attitude” refers to how one is conscious to an experience without making existential claims about it, as in, whether a phenomenon is true or false (Husserl, 1954/1970, pp. 135–137). The phenomenological reduction can take place at several levels, but the most relevant to Giorgi's (2009, p. 90) approach is what Husserl (1954/1970, p. 236) introduced as the “phenomenological-psychological reduction”, which can also be referred to as the “scientific phenomenological reduction” (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008, p. 33). This reduction also involves an attitudinal change, which allows the researcher to discern how participants experience phenomena and give meanings to them. It also reveals the subjective aspect of their experiences. (Ibid., p. 33; Giorgi, 2009.) In general, though, when performing the phenomenological reduction, one views phenomena only as presences to consciousness not as existing in reality (Husserl, 1911/2002, p. 48). This is the case even if they would, in fact, exist (Giorgi, 2009, p. 10).

I consider the perspective of the phenomenological reduction to be useful for a number of reasons. In telling someone about a memory, for example, the depiction is never a complete one although it may be truthful. Sometimes, one has forgotten a detail of how an event took place, or one might prefer not to tell about a certain aspect because of the audience one is addressing. When a person tells someone about his or her life they, also, do so from their own subjective perspectives, due to their own historical and cultural background, etc. Due to all the aforementioned reasons a narrative might not have unfolded exactly the way they depicted it, but this does not mean that there is no truth to it. The perspective I take in my study is a choice not to take a stand on existential claims. Instead, I consider the participants' descriptions to reflect how they *experienced* particular events in their lives.

In addition to withholding from making existential claims, a researcher applies the idea of “bracketing” or “epoché”, which also is part of the phenomenological reduction. “Bracketing” refers to putting aside prior knowledge, including theories and assumptions as well as everyday judgments, opinions and prejudices, about a phenomenon in order to focus completely on how the current phenomenon is presented to consciousness. This does not imply that the theoretical knowledge is false or that the reality one perceives ceases to exist; it is only put aside for the sake of paying complete attention to the concrete experience. (Giorgi, 2009; Husserl, 1913/2004,



pp. 112–116; 1954/1970, pp. 135–137.) Besides this, a researcher also “brackets” his or her own experiences of the phenomenon under study and focuses on the experiences as they are articulated by the participants alone (Giorgi, 2009, pp. 87–88, 98–100, 112). Giorgi (2009, p. 91) mentions that a number of researchers find the idea of bracketing complicated due to misinterpreting the procedure. Smith and McIntyre (1982, p. xiv), for instance, claim that the “epoché” means to bracket the outside world and to focus upon inner experiential structures. Zahavi (2008, p.670), however, argues against Smith and McIntyre’s (1982, p. xiv) view and states that those who take the same stance as them have misinterpreted Husserl. Bracketing does not mean an exclusion of reality, rather it allows for more of a focus on reality. What is bracketed is the naïve attitude of taking things for granted. (Zahavi, 2008, p. 670.) Giorgi (2009, p. 91) mentions that people often understand their ongoing experiences in light of past ones. Consequently, we have a tendency to perceive the present as less important because we see it as “identical” to the past. However, instead of being *the same* as the past, the present is likely to be more *similar* to it. (Ibid., p. 91.) Bracketing, then, allows researchers to capture new aspects of the phenomenon under research (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008, p. 33). Still, some researchers might misunderstand bracketing as “forgetting the past” (Giorgi, 2009, p. 92). Bracketing does not imply one “to become a ‘new Adam or Eve’, as though we lost our linguistic ability and are trying to invent language for the first time” (ibid., p. 93). Rather, it means that one ought to separate the two temporal modes (past from present and vice versa) and, as stated above, ought not to allow the past to unduly influence how one perceives the present (ibid. pp. 92–93).

#### **3.2.4 A social psychological perspective and sensitivity towards the phenomena**

Besides adopting the “scientific phenomenological reduction”, a researcher within Giorgi’s (2009, pp. 98–100, 112; 2008, pp. 38, 41; 1985, p. 10) framework adopts a “psychological perspective”. Giorgi (2009, p. 135) explains that a “psychological perspective” is a general, non-theoretical viewpoint which does not entail one to use mainstream psychological theories or presuppositions to articulate the structure of an experience. Giorgi and Giorgi (2008, p. 48) state that phenomenological research is “discovery oriented rather than hypothesis proving or theory testing”. For Giorgi (2009, p. 109) “the meaning of psychology” implies one to address individuals’ subjective worlds. Consequently, researchers working within his framework pose

questions about the participants' experiences of a particular phenomenon of interest in order for the participants to describe their experiences as concretely as possible. Following this, the psychological perspective would require researchers to discover and clarify the participants' subjective meanings, which have a tendency to be implicitly present in the participants' descriptions. It is, however, important to remember that individuals' subjective experiences also are influenced by the outside world. As a consequence, this requires that researchers pay attention also to social and cultural factors influencing the participants' subjective experiences. (Ibid., pp. 81–82, 109–110, 122, 135.)

Instead of assuming the psychological perspective, Giorgi (2009, p. xiii) advises researchers within other scientific disciplines “to assume the attitude of their specific disciplines”. The meaning of this statement is quite vague. Nevertheless, as stated above, for all researchers following Husserl, the perspective ought to be descriptive and non-theoretical. So, working within the discipline of social psychology notwithstanding, my starting point is to be open to the participants' experiences instead of imposing a particular social psychological theory on the data while analyzing it. Following the actual analysis, it is however possible to connect the empirical findings to other research findings and relevant social psychological theories (Perttula, 2000, p. 440).

As mentioned previously, I also believe that experiences are shared and, as such, social. Although I look for the subjective meanings of the participants' experiences, I also intend to highlight the experiences that they have in common. This is in accordance with Giorgi's (2009) approach (see next section). The phenomena I am interested in are also more social and cultural in nature. For instance, being a child soldier requires a child to be part of an armed group, and the experience of moving from one country to another involves a cultural change. These social and cultural phenomena greatly affect their personal experiences. Doise (1986, pp. 10–17) distinguishes between four levels of analysis within social psychological research. At the intra-personal level researchers analyze how individuals organize their experiences, while at the inter-personal and situational level the focus is on individuals' relationships in a particular situation and moment in time. The positional level is concerned with individuals' social positions, for instance, as part of a particular group, and the ideological level takes into consideration the cultural and societal ideologies (beliefs, representations, values and norms) which impact

individuals' experiences. Cross-cultural studies fit within the fourth level. Doise (*ibid.*, p. 114) stresses the importance of using several levels of analysis in social psychological research, since this can "enrich our understanding of complex problems". In my study, I will deal with the first level of analysis when looking at the participants' individual experiences and their organization of these. Within their subjective accounts, though, I will most likely find meanings relating to the three other levels of analysis (such as, descriptions of their relationships, their former membership in an armed group with military values and norms and the group's effects on them, as well as cross-cultural issues).

In conjunction with adopting a "social psychological perspective", a researcher should also have a "sensitive attitude to the phenomenon under study" (Giorgi, 2008, p. 42). What is meant by this statement is not so clear either. Giorgi mentions that it implies that the researcher notices a change in perspective depending on the phenomenon being studied, be it e.g. the phenomenon of learning or of being a soldier. (*ibid.*, p. 42.) How I understand this, is that one constantly ought to be aware of and concretely direct one's attention to the phenomenon in order to be able to tell whether part of a description is relevant for understanding the phenomenon or not. Now I will conclude this chapter by describing the final procedure involved in both Husserl's philosophical and Giorgi's psychological frameworks, that of "free imaginative variation" which is used to elucidate a phenomenon's structure.

### **3.2.5 Free imaginative variation and the experiential structure**

"Free imaginative variation" is performed in order to find the essential features of a phenomenon (Husserl, 1913/2004, pp. 195–198). Giorgi (2009, p. 69) explains this process as follows: a researcher begins by reflecting upon a concrete phenomenon and then imaginatively takes away a feature of the phenomenon in order to distinguish whether the phenomenon is significantly changed in the absence of the feature or not. If the phenomenon is transformed significantly as a consequence, then the feature is most likely an essential part of the phenomenon. If no significant change occurs, then the feature is most likely not essential to the phenomenon. (*Ibid.*, p. 69.) Let us consider child soldiery, for example. Would the phenomenon be the same if one removed the feature of "being part of an armed force"? Considering the

participants in my study, the removal of this feature would change the phenomenon significantly, since, for them, being a child soldier was closely connected to being part of an armed group. Consequently, in the context of my study, being part of an armed group as a child is an essential feature of the phenomenon of child soldiery.

Phenomenological psychologists carry out the procedure of “free imaginative variation” similarly to how philosophers do, except instead of searching for the *essence* of a phenomenon, they aim at finding a *structure* (or *structures*) of human beings’ lived experiences of phenomena. (Giorgi, 2009, pp. 69, 100–101.) Giorgi (2008, p. 46) chooses to employ the word “structure” instead of “essence” due to the complexity of life experiences, amongst other things. Although the experiences described by the participants differ in many ways, the structure reflects the experiential meaning that they share (Giorgi, 2009, pp. 100–102). Giorgi (*ibid.*, p. 100) compares the structure of an experience to “the mean, median, or mode in statistics”. It elucidates the (social) psychological aspect of the situations that the participants have lived through and, consequently, gives a more profound comprehension of their experiences. Considering “free imaginative variation”, then, the researcher distinguishes which of the subjective meanings are essential in order to understand the participants’ experiences of a phenomenon. The purpose is to look for the invariable meanings across the whole data whereby these meanings can be viewed as interdependent parts that form a whole, which Giorgi (*ibid.*, p. 103) calls “intrastructural variability”. So even when there is divergence in the data, the data still fits into an overall structure. If the meanings can be incorporated into one structure, the description of the structure is more general. On the other hand, “interstructural variability” refers to the case when the data variations are high and cannot be incorporated into one structure. Therefore, several structures have to be made in order to accurately describe the phenomenon. This would then mean that the lived experiences of a particular phenomenon are extremely variable, although they all can be classified as a particular type of phenomenon (e.g. child soldiery). An indication of this type of variability is that the researcher has to use exceedingly abstract language to describe the structure. As mentioned above, the structure reflects the common invariable meaning of the participants’ life experiences of a particular phenomenon, and it also covers, although not necessarily explicitly, the participants’ divergent meanings. When writing individual structures for all participants, the structures conceal more about the

individuals' personal experiences, whereas writing an overall structure conceals more about the phenomenon under study. (Giorgi, 2009, pp. 69, 102–104; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008.)

The experiential structures of phenomena are seen as context-dependent (Giorgi, 2009, pp. 100–101, 111). Giorgi states that contextual factors (e.g. socio-cultural ones) play a vital role in studies with human subjects in general. If universality was sought for, the structure would have to be described so abstractly that it would fail to capture the value of the subjective features of the participants' experiences. Even so, the structure is seen as general in the way that the research results surpass the particular research situation. (Ibid. pp. 100–101, 111.) For example, from a philosophical point of view, child soldiery could be defined as being part of an armed group as a child. Even though this is a vital and universal characteristic of the phenomenon, it is irrelevant for understanding it from a social psychological point of view. The aim of a phenomenological social psychologist would instead be to understand how, for instance, a person experienced the cultural change from civilian life to being a member of an armed group (e.g. did the person start identifying with the soldiers or not) and compare this experience to accounts by other former child soldiers.

In sum, considering the whole of this chapter, the main goal for a phenomenological social psychological researcher is to find the structure or common invariable meaning of an experience. In order to find the structure, the researcher first has to collect descriptions from persons within the natural attitude, who have experienced a particular phenomenon of interest. Following this, the researcher analyzes and describes the data from within the social psychological phenomenological reduction, with a focus on the subjective meanings in the descriptions and with a sensitive attitude towards the research-phenomenon. Finally, the researcher imaginatively distinguishes which of the subjective meanings are invariable and essential to describe the participants' common experience of the phenomenon of interest. If necessary, more than one structure can be made in order to adequately capture the meaning of an experience. Having introduced the phenomenological psychological framework of my study, I will now turn to clarifying my research questions.

### ***3.3 Aim of research and research questions***

The purpose of my study is to shed light on the experiences of five individuals from the hard to reach group of former child soldiers in order to better understand the issues they struggle with, particularly, in adapting to a new cultural setting. I hope that my study would be helpful for people working with these youths and for developing better tools to help them adapt to both to civil society and a new culture. Besides this, one of the participants asked me whether I was not studying this topic in order to increase my own professional knowledge in the area. My answer to him was “yes”; it is also an interest of mine since I would like to work with former child soldiers in the future.

Similarly to many qualitative studies, my research process has been circular. This means that the research steps that I have taken have been interlinked rather than performed separately in a linear fashion (as is the case in quantitative research). This has given me the flexibility to modify my research plan and my research questions throughout the research process. My decisions on how to proceed have been based on questioning the suitability of one step in relation to the other steps. For example, is the theory appropriate and adequate to the topic under study as well as the data? (Flick, 2009, pp. 90–95.) My research questions have been modified several times during the research process, but in the end I settled on the following questions:

1. *How do the participants describe their experiences of having been child soldiers? What does this experience mean for them?*
2. *How do the participants, as former child soldiers, describe their life experiences in Finland and Sweden? What does their experience of living in Finland and Sweden mean for them?*

My aim is to examine both the participants’ subjective and shared experiences and examine whether these can fit within an overall structure or require separate structures to capture the relevant experiences. Separate structures would indicate that their experiences of having been child soldiers are very divergent, while a general structure would highlight their common experiences and the meaning that they share in relation to having been child soldiers. It would,

furthermore, provide more insight on the phenomenon of child soldiery itself. (Giorgi, 2009.) The results will subsequently be compared to results from previous studies of former child soldiers and refugees (Perttula, 2000, p. 440). In the next chapter I describe the descriptive phenomenological method.

## **4 The Descriptive Phenomenological Method**

### ***4.1 Choice of topic***

My interest in the topic of child soldiery arose several years ago when I decided to write my bachelor's thesis about contemporary studies on former child soldiers in three African armed groups. At the time, I was not certain whether it would be possible to conduct an empirical study on the same topic at the master's level. Eventually, the head of an organization<sup>38</sup> promised to assist me in my attempt to find former child soldiers living in Finland. My choice of writing about former child soldiers partly has to do with my own background and experience of living near war-affected areas. I was born in the DRC (formerly Zaire) and lived there until the age of 10. The culture and the history of the country are familiar to me, and I speak both French and Swahili. My family was forced to flee the country due to an armed conflict in 1991. Following this period of time, I lived in Tanzania and Burundi, where I was affected by the conflict between the two tribes of Hutus and Tutsis, which eventually led to the Rwandan genocide in 1994. One year following its outbreak, my family moved to Finland. I was then 14 years old. Besides this, my experience of working as a social worker with asylum seekers, both adults and minors, in Finland has affected my thesis topic.

At the outset, my intention was to write about former child soldiers from the DRC. My personal experience and language skills would have been an asset for researching this specific group. Moreover, the phenomenon of child soldiery is a great problem in the DRC, which needs to be addressed. However, due to difficulties in reaching this target group I eventually decided to include former child soldiers from other countries as well. This is a factor that I am grateful for now, since it broadened the scope of my study and allowed me to compare the similarities and differences in the experiences of a few former child soldiers, all from different countries. It

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<sup>38</sup> The name of the organization is not named due to confidentiality reasons.

also demonstrates that child soldiery is a larger problem effecting children around the world. In the next section, I will describe the process of reaching the five former child soldiers who took part in my study.

## ***4.2 Theoretical sampling***

Since this is a qualitative study, I selected the sample according to the "basic principle of theoretical sampling" (Flick, 2006, p. 129). This means that the sample was chosen due to its significance for the topic under study, rather than in accordance with its representativeness of a specific population<sup>39</sup> (ibid., p. 128; Flick, 2009, p. 91). Basically, my aim was to include former child soldiers, irrespective of gender or country of origin, over 18 years of age who had lived in Europe for a few years. I also wished that they would have a permanent residence permit in a European country. In this respect, I assumed that their life situation would be more stable.

In practice, the sampling procedure was time-consuming and required me to be very motivated. Besides contacting the initial organization referred to in the previous section, I contacted many more organizations, churches, former colleagues, psychologists and the police working with asylum seekers and immigrants in Finland.<sup>40</sup> I also contacted people working with unaccompanied minors and immigrants in Belgium, France<sup>41</sup>, Holland and Great Britain. I applied for and received a travel grant for conducting interviews in Belgium and France, but, unfortunately, was not able to reach enough participants in these two countries. Moreover, I contacted a couple in Sweden whom I was familiar with from when I lived in Africa. They had themselves been working with former child soldiers in the DRC but were now living in Sweden.

Besides this, I was able to present my study at various occasions during the spring of 2011. For example, I took part in two services in the Congolese congregation in Helsinki and

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<sup>39</sup>Due to the difficulty of accessing individuals with this background I was not able to take into consideration some of the criteria mentioned by e.g. Giorgi (2009, pp. 121–122) when selecting the sample.

<sup>40</sup> I was able to contact several of these with the help of the head of the first-mentioned organization and I am very grateful for this.

<sup>41</sup> I was a French interpreter at a conference in September 2010, where I came in contact with several people working with immigrants in Belgium and France. They were willing to assist me in finding possible participants.



was given the opportunity to introduce my study for the whole congregation during the second service. I then left a poster with my contact information in the church in case someone would have this background and be interested in participating. In addition, I put up posters with brief information about my study in Finnish, French, English, Swahili and Swedish (see Appendix B) in various locations e.g. the International Cultural Centre Caisa in Helsinki. A person I had been in contact with in the autumn of 2010 also posted a short presentation of my study at the homepage of the RASMUS Network against Racism and Xenophobia in Finland. Furthermore, I spoke about my study to friends as well as to people that I met (e.g. at work), in the hope they might be familiar with someone of this background.

In the end, I managed to find one participant through an organization. In another case, I was contacted by a person who had heard about my study and knew of a former child soldier. The rest of the participants were found via friends and various people that I met or heard of who knew of someone with this background. I began to look for participants in the summer of 2010, and by the end of February 2011, I had found five participants who were willing to participate in my study. All of them had been child soldiers and had lived in Finland or Sweden for several years. I will now describe the sample in more detail.

#### ***4.2.1 The sample***

All five participants in my study were males aged 22–34 years at the time of the interview. They originated from the following countries: Angola (Cabinda), the Democratic Republic of Congo, El Salvador, Somalia and South Sudan (see Figures 1 and 2). Of the five participants, the youngest during the time of recruitment was approximately seven years old while the oldest was fifteen years old. The time they spent in an armed group varied from approximately six or seven months to six or seven years. The participants' age at the time of arrival in Finland or Sweden varied between 15 and 21 years. One participant arrived in Finland the same year he had exited the armed group. Considering the whole sample, this was the shortest amount of time that had passed since a participant had been a child soldier. The second shortest time was one year. For two participants three years had passed since their involvement in an armed group, while for the fifth participant a significant amount of time had passed since he was a child soldier.

The length of time that the participants had lived in Finland or Sweden varied from approximately 2 years 9 months to 18 years. Out of the five participants, one had been deported and currently lives in his home country. The four remaining participants are still living in Finland. I asked the participants to come up with pseudonyms that I could use instead of their real names. Four of them did. The Congolese participant, however, chose not to fill in the questionnaire in which I asked him to come up with an alias, so I made his alias up (Jean-Baptiste). In the next section, I will describe the introductory meeting, during which I told the participants of the purpose of my study as well as the ethical guidelines that I followed.

*Table 1: Brief background of the sample*

Number of participants	5
Age at time of recruitment	7 – 15
Time spent in armed group	6/7 months – 6/7 years
Age at arrival in Finland/Sweden	15 – 21
Amount of years in Finland/Sweden	3 – 18

### ***4.3 The introductory meeting and research ethics***

Due to the sensitivity of the subject matter, I began by consulting a psychologist who has worked with traumatized immigrants in Finland<sup>42</sup>. First, she advised me not to contact a possible participant directly but, rather, to contact a trusted confidante that knows of his/her experiences. This contact person could, then, provide the possible participant with some preliminary information about my study and suggest meeting with me. Second, she advised that, upon meeting with a possible participant, I would tell them more about the study. During this meeting, I would emphasize that participating in the interview could bring back difficult memories and evoke negative emotions. Third, she advised that I should give them some time (e.g. two weeks) to consider this before deciding whether or not to participate in my study. I followed her advice in all these matters, except for in one case where I had no other option but

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<sup>42</sup> This was in May 2010.

to contact the possible participant myself<sup>43</sup>. Additionally, I consulted an expert in research ethics who advised me to give the participants an opportunity to meet once more after the actual interview(s) and let them speak about how they experienced participating in the study (debriefing).

I met four of the participants face-to-face before interviewing them<sup>44</sup>. During these meetings I told them briefly about myself, my study, and about my reasons for choosing this specific topic. Furthermore, I gave them general information about where my master's thesis would be kept after I submitted it and who would have access to it (mostly students and people who were interested in the topic). From the very beginning, I followed the three general, Western ethical guidelines of codes and consent, confidentiality, and trust. Codes and consent refer specifically to "informed consent". Accordingly, I emphasized that participating in the interview was completely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point during the research process, giving them concrete examples of this kind of situation (e.g. that they had the right to walk out in the middle of the interview, if they preferred to). I added that they were free to choose what they brought up in the interview and that they did not have to answer a specific question if they preferred not to. I did not ask the participants for written informed consent, since this practice can cause an accentuation of prevailing differences, alienation and scepticism in people originating from oral cultures (see e.g. Ryen, 2004, who has conducted research in sub-Saharan Africa). Instead, I asked them for a verbal consent to participate in my study<sup>45</sup>. (Ryen, 2004, pp. 231–233.)

Confidentiality refers to the protection of "participants' identity, places and location of research" (Ryen, 2004, p. 233). Thus, the participants should be presented anonymously. I also

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<sup>43</sup> In this exceptional case, I received an e-mail from a person who had heard the possible participant have a speech about child soldiering and his own experience of being a child soldier. I found the possible participant's phone number and called him directly. I was very careful in the way I introduced myself and my motive for contacting him. I explained that I had been contacted by this person, who had heard him have a speech about the topic of child soldiering. I told him that I was writing my thesis on this topic and then asked him if he would be interested in meeting up to find out more about my study.

<sup>44</sup> In one case, I did not meet the participant in person since he was in El Salvador, but I sent him an e-mail with the same information that I gave the others during the introductory meeting.

<sup>45</sup> It was different in the case of the one participant that I never met in person. I corresponded with him via e-mail and letters, so he consented to take part in the study in writing.

emphasized this to the participants during our first meeting and exemplified it. Participants are also not to be harmed in any way (*ibid.*, p. 233). This is a delicate issue in studying such a sensitive topic like child soldiering. Hunt (2010, pp. 12, 28, 45–49) discusses several ethical issues that arise in research on traumatic war experiences<sup>46</sup>. The fact that the researcher poses questions about participants' war experiences intentionally makes the participants more distressed and causes them to relive their experiences. This may seem contradictory to research ethics but is unavoidable when discussing highly stressful events. Hunt suggests that one can reduce the distress by notifying them of the types of questions that will be posed, some of which will concern stressful events in their lives. Furthermore, dealing thoroughly with the participants' questions also helps to reduce the distress (*Ibid.*, pp. 12, 28, 45–49.)

When I met the participants for the first time, I described the type of interview I would conduct; that it would not be a strict question-answer interview but that I would pose very open-ended questions (giving them an example of such a question). Part of my plan was also to have a questionnaire that they would fill out during the actual interview. I did not tell the first participant about the questionnaire during the introductory meeting but presented it to him at the time of the interview. He became very uneasy and did not want to fill in the questionnaire. After this experience, I learned to be very clear about presenting all that was included in the interview procedure during our first contact, stressing that everything was voluntary. Additionally, I told the possible participants that I wished to record the interview in case they would participate. I explained the reason for this and highlighted that only I would have access to the recording. Later, before the actual interview I again asked them for the right to record the interview.

The third concept of trust "refers to the relationship between the researcher and the participants and to the researcher's responsibility not to 'spoil' the field for others in the sense that potential research subjects become reluctant to research" (Ryen, 2004, p. 234). This relates to, for instance, building trusting and good relations with participants. From the very beginning, I tried to build trusting relationships with the participants and be truthful about the nature of my study (e.g. that participating could evoke difficult memories and so on). I also kept my promises to the participants. For example, I sent two of the participants a copy of my thesis, as they had

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<sup>46</sup> In the spring of 2010, I also consulted Dr. Nigel Hunt in person about these issues.

wished. During the process of writing my thesis, I also contacted them a few times to let them know that I had not forgotten to send the thesis to them. Moreover, I tried to avoid causing any harm to the participants. I followed the advice of the psychologist and the expert on research ethics. I gave the participants an option to discuss their experiences of the interview process but none of them wished to meet separately for this purpose. In fact, some brought the issue up themselves during or after the interview. For example, one participant mentioned that while it was difficult to speak about his experiences, it was nevertheless important.

Besides the three ethical guidelines discussed above, the researcher also has to be aware of his or her own risk in interviewing traumatised persons. Some participants may become angry and violent when reliving their experiences and, therefore, the researcher should consider their own safety, too. (Hunt, 2010, pp. 12, 28.) I asked the contact person to be present in the interview, but only in one case was the contact person available to be present in the interview. In the other cases where I met the participants in person, I made sure that I interviewed them in a public but secure place (e.g. university facilities). I arranged the seats in a way that it would be easy for me to get out of the room if needed. I, additionally, informed my husband about the time and location of the interview and had my phone ready in case of an emergency.

Another issue that the researcher may encounter is getting distressed when being exposed to the participants' difficult narratives (Hunt, 2010, pp. 47–48). Hunt suggests that the researcher can prepare him- or herself by being aware of what they might be exposed to. Also, while it is important to be empathetic to the participants' experiences, the researcher should keep a distance and not get too emotionally involved. (Ibid., pp. 47–48.) In the case of my study, I believe that being familiar with the topic ahead of time prepared me for the kinds of narratives that I would hear and read. Naturally, I was still emotionally affected by what I heard and read, but it helped to express my feelings and, for instance, do lighter things during my free time, such as exercise or watch a comedy.

Before conducting the interviews, I also considered some ethical issues which can occur in relation to cross-cultural gender-relations (Ryen, 2004, pp. 239–242) being that I am a Finnish woman and the participants are men from different cultural backgrounds. I had to pay attention to the way that I communicated, both verbally and nonverbally, in order not to give them any signs which could be misinterpreted by them as flirtatious. While being genuine, friendly and

caring, I also tried to maintain a distance between myself and the participants and stay in my role as a researcher, so to speak. In the last chapter of this study, I will reflect on how gender issues as well as some other ethical issues (e.g. my position as a member of the majority and the participants' positions as members of ethnic minority groups) that may have had an impact on the reliability of the participants' descriptions. We will now turn to the actual data collection method.

#### ***4.4 Data collection***

According to Giorgi (2009, p. 96), the aim of data collection is to gather rich and concrete descriptions (rather than opinions and attitudes) of research-significant experiences and phenomena. The researcher may ask participants to describe the phenomenon under study in written and/or oral form, both of which are permissible in the descriptive phenomenological method. It is through oral and written narratives that humans often take part in other people's experiential worlds. Mostly, however, the data is collected through interviews, which are later transcribed. (Ibid., pp. 95–96.) Giorgi (ibid., p. 124) does not recommend researchers to use any particular type of interview but gives a concrete example of how an interview question could be formulated: *“Please describe for me a situation in which you have experienced...”*. This interview question is descriptive and open-ended but also very direct. Considering the sensitive topic of my study, it was not appropriate to begin with such a straight forward question as: *“Please, describe your experience as a child soldier”*. In addition, the phenomenon of child soldiery is a process that takes place chronologically over a period of time as is moving and adjusting to another country. Therefore, it seemed suitable to use Atkinson's (1998; 2002) life story interview.

Atkinson (2002, p. 125) defines a life story as *“the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestly as possible”*. It entails *“what the person remembers of it [his or her life] and what he or she wants others to know of it, usually as a result of a guided interview by another”*. He adds that *“[i]t includes the important events, experiences, and feelings of a lifetime”* (ibid., p., 125). Giorgi (2009, p. 107) also emphasizes that one cannot expect all aspects of an experience to be expressed by the participant. In the end,

the participants themselves choose which particular situations to describe; what is sought is as authentic a description as possible (*ibid.*, pp. 95–96).

Due to the life story interview's interdisciplinary nature, it is flexible and allows the researcher to structure the interview in a way suitable for the purpose of the study as well as the researcher's approach (Atkinson, 1998, p. 43; 2002, p. 213). Thus, I was able to adapt the interview to Giorgi's method and focus on the participants' whole lives chronologically, while paying particular attention to their experiences of the research-significant events and periods in their lives. As a result, I was able to gather descriptions which had an adequate amount of depth and were sufficiently detailed (Giorgi, 2009, p. 107).

According to Atkinson's (2002, p. 131; 1998, pp. 41–53) guidelines, I prepared an interview guide with a set of open-ended questions. The interview guide consisted of seven parts which were both chronologically and thematically structured and focused on the participants' 1) childhoods, 2) time in the armed group, 3) immediate period following their exit out of an armed group, 4) journey to Finland or Sweden, 5) first year in Finland or Sweden, 6) current life situation and 7) future prospects. Each part could include a few sub-questions, but most of the parts were made up of one main question. (See Appendix C for the complete interview guide with questions.) I posed the questions in the interview guide to all participants, unless they themselves covered a topic on their own. Besides the questions in the interview guide, I had prepared some additional questions to pose in case the participants, for instance, gave very short descriptions or had difficulties in narrating. (*Ibid.*, p. 131; *ibid.*, pp. 41–53.)

My initial aim was to conduct only oral interviews, but in Walter Ayala's case this was not possible. Therefore, I conducted four oral interviews and one written interview<sup>47</sup>. I travelled to another Finnish town for one introductory meeting, while the rest of the introductory meetings and all oral interviews were conducted in Helsinki. The languages utilized in the interviews were French, Finnish, Swedish and/or English. All oral interviews were recorded with the participant's permission. In the actual interview situation I gave the participants a questionnaire to fill out. In this questionnaire, I inquired about some background information, such as gender and age. (See Appendix D for the entire questionnaire.) Four out of five participants filled out

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<sup>47</sup> I will consider the impact of this on the reliability of the data in the discussion.

the questionnaire. I also gave four participants the option to write down the most important events in their life (e.g. a timeline) or draw pictures of these, if they wished. These were only meant to serve as tools for them in describing their life experiences. (Atkinson, 1998, p. 42.) Only one participant chose to draw a timeline of his life. Concerning the participant from El Salvador, I sent him all the material<sup>48</sup> by regular mail since I wanted to ensure his anonymity and considered it more secure than the Internet.

In the interview situation, I tried mainly to listen to the interviewee's story but also steered the interview if required (e.g. interrupted and guided the participant back to the topic of interest) (Atkinson, 1998, p. 32; 2002, p. 126; Giorgi, 2009, p. 122). A disadvantage with this method is that not all participants find it easy to narrate. Nevertheless, this method allows one to be flexible and adapt to the interview situation (e.g. by posing more questions if needed); so, in the end, this did not pose any obstacles (Atkinson, 1998, p. 42). The amount of time an interview lasted varied from 1, 5 hours to 2, 5 hours. Following an interview, I always asked the participants if I could contact them again or perhaps meet them once more in case I had follow-up questions. Two agreed to this, while two wished not to meet in person again. I met only one participant (Chris Black) twice. All interviews were transcribed (see Appendix E for the transcription notation system used in this study). The number of pages that the transcribed material amounted to varied from 34, 5 pages (1, 5 hours' interview) to 75 pages (2, 5 hours' interview). The first interview was the most challenging, but also the most instructive. I learned from the mistakes I did (e.g. keeping the interview from getting too sidetracked, remaining silent). Overall, the interviews went well. In the next section, we will proceed to the process of analysis.

#### ***4.5 The concrete steps of analysis***

When analyzing the data I followed Giorgi's (2009) general outline for conducting a descriptive phenomenological analysis, together with some modifications made by Wertz (1985; 2005). Wertz (1985, p. 160) criticizes Giorgi for not being elaborate enough in describing the

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<sup>48</sup> The questionnaire, the interview questions and a letter with instructions. I also included the material he needed for writing me back, a return envelope with my address and covered the expenses for sending it all back to me.



methodological steps, so, he presents them in more detail. His adjustments were practical considering the large amount of data that I have and the complex life-experiences that I study, which evolve through time. Similarly to Giorgi (2009, p. 14) though, Wertz (1985, p. 160) points out that the method does not have to be followed strictly but can be developed in order to suit the research-phenomenon and the researcher's personal way of conducting research. All four steps of analysis, however, require the researcher to assume the “scientific phenomenological reduction”, a social psychological perspective and a sensitive attitude towards the research phenomenon (see Chapter 3). I will describe how I assumed these three perspectives in practice in the first step of analysis (though the reader should bear in mind that they apply to the rest of the steps as well).

*The first step* of analysis involved reading through each transcription to get a broad sense of each (Giorgi, 2009, p. 128). During this phase, I took on the perspective of the scientific phenomenological reduction, meaning that I attempted to recognize how each participant subjectively experienced the two central phenomena under study (that of being a child soldier and living in Finland/Sweden) without making any existential claims about their descriptions. This required me to be sensitive to whether the various parts in the descriptions were significant for understanding the two relevant phenomena or not and to discern what the experiences meant for them from a social psychological viewpoint. In practice, when assuming a social psychological perspective, I kept in mind Doise's (1986) four levels of analysis (see Chapter 3) in order to distinguish any social psychological aspects (whether emotional, social, racial, relational, cultural, or cross-cultural) that affected their personal experiences. Assuming the scientific phenomenological reduction also required me to apply the idea of bracketing (see Chapter 3) and focusing completely on the participants' descriptions without imposing any interpretations on them. Naturally, I could not fail to recall the literature I have previously read about the two phenomena under study (nor did I have to). Instead, I chose not to let the results from previous studies effect the participants' stories but focused only on what they themselves presented in their descriptions.

I also kept in mind that the descriptions were provided by the participants from the natural attitude, that is, as lived through in a taken for granted world. When reading through the transcripts, I then tried to recognize the way that the participants were conscious of various

aspects of the phenomena under study, since the way they experienced an internal object (in this case, a memory) reflected its meaning (Giorgi, 2009, pp. 128–129). For example, Walter Ayala described his childhood as follows: “*My childhood was a hell of blood and suffering. If I had the possibility to be a child again, I would say “never” if I would have the same life*”. Here, the meaning is very clear. The participant experienced his entire childhood extremely negatively and would choose not to re-experience it. For him, being a child meant “*a hell of blood and suffering*”. When reading through the whole transcription, I found other more complex meanings related to this aforementioned description of his childhood as well as more concrete examples of what he meant by “*a hell of blood and suffering*”. These meanings and examples will be presented in Chapter 5. In addition, I tried to make explicit what was implicit and taken for granted in their descriptions. I was also attentive to whether the participants had any experiences in common. (Giorgi, 2009, pp. 128–129.)

*The second step* entailed breaking up the transcription into relevant meaning units in order to facilitate the analysis. Both Giorgi (2009, p. 130) and Wertz (1985, p. 165) highlight that the way researchers distinguish meaning units vary. There is no one way to go about this; rather, it is a spontaneous process. According to Wertz (1985, pp. 165–166), some researchers prefer to work with detailed meaning units, while others prefer broader meaning units. Generally, I chose to work with broader meaning units because of the large amount of data. I followed Wertz's (1985, p. 165) suggestions, according to which, meaning units can be distinguished thematically and temporally and did so manually via word processor. For example, all participants described how they became part of an armed force. The recruitment experience constituted a larger meaning unit, which was designated according to whether the participants were forcibly or voluntarily recruited. This type of larger meaning unit also constituted a temporal phase within the participant's narrative. More detailed meanings and themes were then recognized within each of the larger meaning units.

Having distinguished meaning units within a transcription, I then differentiated between significant ones, which were relevant for the study and revealed something about the experiences I was interested in, and ones insignificant to the phenomena under study. Here I had to pay attention to meaning units which did not necessarily reveal anything about the actual experience but stood in contrast to the phenomenon and, therefore, highlighted the phenomenon itself. Jean-

Baptiste, for example, went to school before being abducted by the UPC and then lost this opportunity when becoming a child soldier. This particular description is relevant in that it was connected to his experience of child soldiery, an experience which involved various sorts of losses. Having singled out insignificant meaning units and other irrelevant expressions from significant ones, I removed them. (Wertz, 1985, p. 167; 2005, p. 172.)

*The third step* consisted of reorganizing the significant social psychological meaning units into a temporal order<sup>49</sup> (Wertz, 1985, pp. 167–168; 2005). Wertz emphasizes the necessity of this phase specifically in the case of disorganized data. The participant may, for example, repeat him- or herself, skip certain issues or backtrack to a particular topic later on in the interview. The way that the description progresses, therefore, does not reflect how the original life-event progressed. Since the aim is to obtain a description which reflects the real-life event as authentically and completely as possible, the description needs to be refined in order for the researcher to access the phenomenon. This is why the meaning units are organized into a temporal order. (Ibid., pp. 164–168.) Although I did organize the meaning units temporally, I did not compose them as word for word narratives as Wertz suggests, since this would have been too time consuming and also unnecessary in order to find the meaning of the two relevant phenomena. Instead, I grouped all the participants' meaning units of, for example, a particular time in their life (such as their first year in Finland/Sweden) or meaning units expressing similar content and themes (such as descriptions of drug abuse while in the armed group) into their respective sections. I then recognized the various themes in a particular section and the meaning that this particular time or thematic aspect had for them.<sup>50</sup> Following this, I tried to find the parts which were essential in order to describe how the participants had experienced being child soldiers and living in exile, i.e. what the experiences meant for them individually from a social psychological point of view (free imaginative variation, see Chapter 3). Having found the

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<sup>49</sup> This step diverged from Giorgi's (2009, pp. 130–137) third step, which would have required me to transform the meaning units into phenomenologically and social psychologically sensitive expressions.

<sup>50</sup> This procedure and the aforementioned process of distinguishing relevant meaning units from irrelevant ones, fits Atkinson's (1998, p. 56) description of a transcribed life story interview, according to which, one can remove irrelevant utterances or shift certain interview parts around in order to "keep similar content together".

essential parts, I then wrote down the structure of each description (idiographic level of analysis).

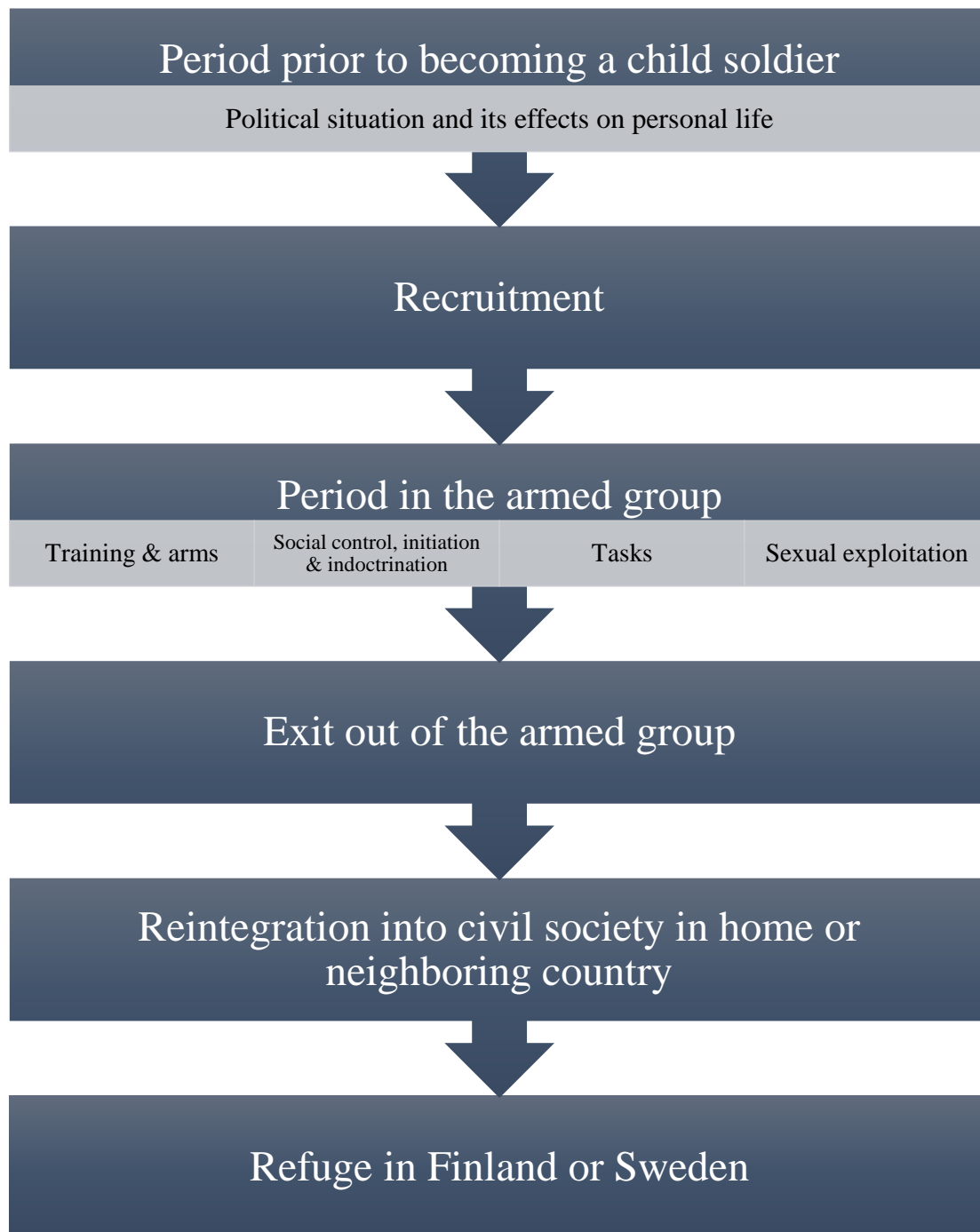
*The fourth and final step* involved moving from the individual experiential structures into finding a general structure across the cases of the two phenomena under study (Giorgi, 1985, p. 19; Wertz, 1985, p. 188; 2005, pp. 172–173). In practice, I compared the individual cases to one another and watched for (explicit and implicit) similarities and differences between the cases. At this stage, I noticed that the participants' experiences of living in Finland/Sweden were, in fact, connected to their child soldier experiences. As a result, I looked only for the structure(s) of the phenomenon of child soldiery. The similarities I found, then, became part of the general structure of child soldiery, whereas the divergences expressed individual structural features. In order to assess which of the general features were essential to describe the phenomenon as experienced by the participants in my study, I still conducted "free imaginative variation" (see Chapter 3). I asked myself whether the phenomenon could be described without a particular feature and concluded that the feature was necessary to the phenomenon if the answer was "no". I also had to question whether the general features included in the structure were sufficient for describing the whole phenomenon or not. If they were not, I added more relevant features to the structure until the included features satisfactorily described the entire phenomenon. (Wertz, 1985, p. 188–191.) The structure, which reflects the common invariable meaning of the participants' life experiences of having been child soldiers (i.e. the general features that applied to all participants) and also includes the participants' divergent meanings (i.e. the individual structural features), will be presented in the next chapter. Note that structures can vary greatly, for instance, in how detailed and deep they are. The structure I found was broad yet detailed. (Giorgi, 2009, pp. 103, 191.)

## **5 Results**

The structure of the phenomenon of child soldiery found in this study was both temporal and thematic. It is presented in the Figure below and includes both the general features which were common to all five participants in my study and the individual structural features, which applied to some of them. Generally, all participants experienced a period prior to becoming child

soldiers, which contrasted with their actual experiences of being child soldiers (i.e. they were not born into the armed group). All participants also described the intergroup relations and conflicts, which came to affect them in a very personal way and led them to becoming child soldiers either immediately or following some time. The actual experience of being a child soldier began when they were recruited into an armed group voluntarily or by force. All participants described their individual tasks in the armed group and/or the tasks in which the whole group was involved. In addition, they all brought up the topic of the armed group's social control, initiation and indoctrination strategies. Only some of them received training. The same applied to the experience of sexual exploitation. Part of the experience of being a child soldier involved exiting the armed group in one way or another. While most of the participants reintegrated into civil society in their home or neighboring countries, one of them fled directly to Finland after his exit out of the armed group. Nevertheless, for all five participants the experience of child soldiery was connected to their forced migration to Finland/Sweden. I will now turn to presenting the structural features in more detail with extracts from the actual interviews.

Figure 3: Structure of the phenomenon of child soldiery (darker boxes are temporal features, lighter boxes are thematic features)



### ***5.1 Period prior to becoming a child soldier***

For all participants there was a stage before becoming a child soldier that contrasted with the difficulties they faced due to the political situation in their home countries as well as their experiences of being child soldiers. For Walter Ayala this period lasted for a few years of his early life, and, while it had its own hardships, it still differed from the circumstances that would lead him to joining the *guerrilla*. *“I do not remember so much of my childhood in the village, I only remember that we lived under very poor circumstances, that we sometimes had nothing to eat, but still we were happy there”*. The overarching meaning of this period relates to his family’s contentment in the face of economic adversity.

Chris Black, Jean-Baptiste and Mohamed describe their experiences of going to school before either being affected by the political situation or being recruited by an armed group. They lived a somewhat normal life, which was marked by the absence of political violence, though Chris Black described this early period in his life as *“a little better”* than his later life.

Jean-Baptiste attended school and had dreams of becoming a doctor. Education was a positive aspect of his life, although he, too, faced various hardships in his early childhood. He had been separated from his parents when he was but a child, as his parents migrated to another location because of his father's work. When describing the separation from his parents he mentions that he was *“left”* with his grand-mother, an expression indicating a feeling of abandonment. Being separated from his family was a theme he would re-experience in a very traumatic way later on in his life. Jean-Baptiste was reared by his grand-mother, who later on in the interview, he would refer to as *“mother”*. Her death was a turning point in his life. Losing her also led to the loss of his home and life in the city as he had no other choice but to move to the village where his parents resided. *“I traveled there because of suffering, because of grand-mother's death...it was not my wish.”* Moving to the village also meant going somewhere where he felt alienated and different. *“I am a city-boy...not a villager...I was not familiar with their lifestyle...I cannot mix with villagers.”* The greatest consequence of this event, however, was that it placed him within the grasp of the UPC.

Mohamed also described going to a school, though of religious instruction. *“I went to Koran school. During school time...I was not a good boy... I always skipped classes... If I went [to*

*school] one week, the next week I wouldn't go*". Mohamed's experience of being a child soldier differed from the rest of the participants' in that he sought it out as an opportunity to live a criminal life. Although, he started misbehaving and rebelling already at a young age, this phase contrasted with the more hardened criminal life he would later lead.

Baziel is the only participant who did not explicitly describe a phase during which he was not affected by the war in Sudan: *"When I was born, then the war broke out after one year of my birth"*. Still, prior to his recruitment, Baziel described being at *"the cattle camp...where there is grass and water."* It was from the cattle camp that he was called home and told about the migration to Ethiopia. Based on the above extract, it then seems like he also experienced a short period during which he was not immediately affected by war. The phase prior to becoming a child soldier was a general feature for the participants in my study. It is against the background of their early lives that the drastic (and many times tragic) events of their recruitment figures so pronouncedly. This period also applies to most other former child soldiers, save those born into an armed group.

## ***5.2 Political situation and its effects on personal life***

All the participants described the political conflicts which eventually came to affect their own lives. From a social psychological point of view these particular extracts described the participants' group memberships and the consequences of belonging to said groups in society (i.e. injustice, inequality, powerlessness, suffering, extermination, violent conflict and so on). Walter Ayala's description provided a good example of the kinds of incidents a child might face prior to their recruitment as a soldier. He described the political situation in El Salvador as follows:

*"In 1980 a period began, which was very difficult for us. A war started between the Poor and the rich, who had all power. The ordinary People demanded... rights, but the answer was war...The military...defended the rich people's interests, and the poor wanted their rights to be respected, and to fight against the government, the guerrilla was founded. The guerrilla fought for the rights of the poor."*



He went on to describe his mother's own political involvement, as a member of organizations fighting for human rights as well as the government's response: "*The government gave orders to murder all who were involved in the organizations protesting against the government.*" As a consequence, "*[t]he military came to our villages and murdered all who they found.*" When government soldiers finally reached his village: "*[e]verybody started to flee... and nobody noticed that I and my siblings were there.*" This is the first time that the participant described being separated from the rest of his family and him being surrounded by violence and death, themes which would be repeated many times in his life. Similarly to other former FMLN child soldiers (Dickson-Gómez's, 2003) he was forced to witness the brutal murders of his family members and was himself a victim of attempted murder at a very young age:

*"[T]he military shot him [a relative] in the leg and then a soldier went up to him and chopped him in half with a machete. We [the participant and his siblings] started screaming and crying, then the military came to us and took my sister who was X years old and murdered her and then my brother who was X years old. Then they took me and threw me into the kitchen and my head hit the wall. I was unconscious then, and when I woke up again I felt that I had much blood on my body."*

The sole survivor, Walter Ayala described the extreme loneliness and isolation that he experienced as he laid there for two days and a night amongst the corpses of his loved ones. It was during that time that: "*pigs and dogs wanted to eat up my [relative] and my siblings. I just took stones and threw them.*" While he did not remember many of the details following these traumatic events, he described the re-unification with his mother after the massacre as the only positive aspect during this episode: "*when my mother came back I was so happy and screamed: 'they murdered my siblings, mummy, they murdered my siblings', I remember how my mother cried.*" Because of the government armed forces' future threats, he and his family were forced into exile in neighboring Honduras. This was the first time that Walter Ayala lost his home. The other participants were also affected by the political situations in their home countries though in differing ways. The Angolan army's attempted murder of Chris Black's father, who was involved in Cabindan politics, was the turning point of his life. While his father managed

to flee, Chris Black mentions: “*our life became very difficult.*” After his father's disappearance, Chris Black's family was constantly harassed by the Angolan army. Attempting to discover his father's whereabouts, the soldiers would enter his home and interrogate him and his family employing such methods as verbal and physical abuse. With his father's disappearance, Chris Black experienced a loss of formal schooling, a worsened economic situation, abandonment, increased uncertainty (he did not know his father's whereabouts), and continual insecurity. This event also came to affect his relationship to the FLEC that would abduct him a few years later. It is interesting to note the similarities in Walter Ayala's and Chris Black's experiences. Both of their parents were politically involved and both experienced one or several military attacks in their homes. While the rest of the participants also described the political situation in their home countries, they did so in relation to their recruitment experiences. Considering this general feature, one could assume that it applies to most (if not all) child soldiers, since they all have their own understanding (whether political/ideological/religious) of their participation in an armed conflict.

### ***5.3 Recruitment experiences***

The participants' recruitment experiences vary to a large extent. Jean-Baptiste and Chris Black were both abducted, while Baziel was basically tricked into joining the SPLA. Mohamed and Walter Ayala joined voluntarily, but for dissimilar reasons.

Jean-Baptiste began his description with the tribal conflicts between the Lendu and the Hema, who were “*rebell... in order to take over the country*”. He then continued:

*“Now, during the night they come... they break your door and start killing the people... They rape and beat. They take the men by force to the military. That is how I went... I didn't want to... I was afraid to go lead a military life, it was not my will, it was their will. Me, I went by force. It was not my wish to go lead a military life, because I lost everything, my studies, because of that.”*

It should be noted that throughout the interview Jean-Baptiste constantly stressed that he did *not* join the armed group voluntarily but was forced to do so under the threat of death. Later in the interview Jean-Baptiste described the aforementioned event in a more personal way. He mentioned that his parents were beaten while he hid under the bed. Eventually, he too was beaten until he was permanently injured (*“that is why I always have pain in my back now”*) and forced to join the UPC akin to many former RUF child soldiers (see Denov, 2010). Once again, the participant experienced a separation from his family, a loss of his home, and now familiar surroundings. For him the abduction meant, as he described it, a loss of everything. The armed group did not only violate his home but also his physical and emotional realms. Besides the terror he described above, this event continues to evoke negative emotions: *“I have many bad memories...It hurts me to remember, hurts, hurts, hurts in my heart.”* One of the consequences of this event in his present life is his uncertainty of what happened to his father: *“I don't know... I don't know if he is alive.”*

Chris Black was also suddenly coerced into joining the FLEC while returning home from the market: *“When I was on the way back Cabinda's army, FLEC, captured me. They captured all the people who were going to or from the market.”* Similarly to Jean-Baptiste he had no option but to join, unless he was willing to die: *“If you tried to escape, they shot you immediately.”* The next extract reflects the terror he experienced and saw: *“I also got the feeling 'I'll run away from here', but they killed them when they ran away.”* Besides the aforementioned issues, the recruitment also involved the physically straining activity of walking for several days under armed guard and being left without food unless one was able to pay for it, although Chris Black resourcefully sold his necklace to get money for food. As with Jean-Baptiste, the recruitment meant a forced separation from and loss of his mother and siblings, his home and familiar surroundings. The participant also described that he concealed his real name and identity from members of the FLEC because they assumed that his father was a traitor. However, in order to protect the participant's anonymity I will not describe the reasons for their assumption. Both Jean-Baptiste's and Chris Black's experiences resembled what many former child soldiers in Uganda, Sierra Leone and the DRC have experienced: witnessing and/or being victims of violence, being abruptly forced to join under the threat of death, etc. (see Denov, 2010; Trenholm & al., 2012; Vindevogel et al., 2011).

Baziel's recruitment differed from the rest of the participants' but coincided with the experiences of many former SPLA child soldiers (Children Rights Project and Human Rights Watch, 1994; Rone, 1995). He began by describing more generally how he and many other children were separated from their families and taken by the SPLA to Ethiopia for protection and, unknowingly, for military recruitment. Following this, he related his own personal recruitment experience, which reflected how uninformed he was about what was happening. At the time, Baziel perceived the migration as very positive. For him it meant social relationships and education.

*"I just say 'Hey, is so and so going?', 'Yes'... And, that is a very fantastic thing. I would go. So with me I had no objection. I didn't know what was happening, what it was, but I just knew that we were going somewhere and that is a very good place. The only thing they told us... 'in that place you gonna study'... We had no access to education when the war broke out in Sudan... so it was a good thing that we were going to school. That was it. So, that's all I knew about it."*

Although Baziel's recruitment experience differed greatly from Jean-Baptiste's and Chris Black's, it was not voluntary because his parents had to co-operate with the SPLA and send their sons away to Ethiopia unless they had very specific reasons not to. For daughters it was different: *"My sister wanted to come, but my mother refused... The good thing... was that they [girls] were not forced to leave their parents."* This implies unequal gender treatment and parents too having been forcibly separated from their sons. Despite the participant's positive attitude towards migrating to Ethiopia, the previous quote reflects the negative and involuntary nature of the separation from his parents.

Baziel's recruitment experience also included the journey to Ethiopia, part of which he was accompanied by his mother, who helped carry his food, since it was impossible for a child so small to carry such heavy weight. Once his food was finished, though, his mother returned home. The participant never mentioned ever seeing her again after this separation. Similarly to many former SPLA child soldiers (Geltman et al., 2005), Baziel also described the many physical and environmental challenges they faced on the journey, such as having to cross a desert and running out of drinking water. For him, this was *"the beginning of the nightmare"* as many started to die.

The children were also attacked by wild animals and a hostile tribe who opened fire at them one evening when they were preparing their dinner. For him the journey itself, described in very negative terms, meant physical and emotional fatigue, thirst, hunger, dangers, threats, armed violence, survival from and bearing witness to death. For Baziél, the recruitment was connected to social relationships and education, but it also meant refuge from war, being uprooted from his family, home, familiar surroundings and country<sup>51</sup>.

While the three previous participants were recruited involuntarily, Walter Ayala and Mohamed were voluntary recruits. Following a time of refuge, during which Walter Ayala faced numerous hardships, his family decided to return to El Salvador in order to join the fight against the government. Walter Ayala described his experience of joining the *guerrilla* as follows:

*“So the guerrilla and the military wanted to recruit all whom they could. I was very willing to partake. I wanted to kill those who had murdered my siblings, and many relatives of mine. One day the guerrilla came to my ‘school’ [which was under a mango tree]. [A]ll my classmates joined, we were 14 children aged 11–13 years... I was [h]appy and not afraid [b]ecause all my friends took part. Now was the time to kill the military... My whole family joined too... The word was: death or life!”*

For Walter Ayala the recruitment was positive. It meant revenge on the enemy (the military) and allegiance to the FMLN and its cause. These motives for joining the *guerrilla* resemble the motives described by other former FMLN child soldiers (Dickson-Gómez, 2003). For Walter Ayala, the recruitment was, however, also a social occasion in that the participant's friends and family also joined the *guerrilla*. So, besides revenge and commitment to the FMLN, the recruitment also meant community.

Mohamed joined the USC with his own volition: *“From the first day that the war started, I participated... No group leader... ordered ‘do this and do that’, no. ... Nobody forced... Most...*

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51 The participant's present evaluation of the SPLA's and the parents' decision is still positive in that it saved many young lives from bombings and massacres and because *“most of these young men who survived the transition have acquired higher education and their experience would help them shape the young nation of South Sudan”*. Nevertheless, he disagreed with the practical arrangements of their stay in Ethiopia. The participant believed that many of his comrades would have still been alive had things been handled differently.

*of my friends, we... participated in the war... Personally, I don't know for what reason I took part in the war... Nobody offered me money... We had no other purpose, but to rob... empty houses... The purpose was just to get money and...khat<sup>52</sup>."*

The previous extract illustrates Mohamed's lack of clear motives for participating in the war outside of the fact that the situation provided an opportunity to live an outlaw's life (committing robberies, taking drugs) together with others of the same mind-set. However, upon further reflection he later stated that he took part in the war out of "*stupidity*". In addition to this, Mohamed described the in- and out-group relations (him being part of Mohamed Farrah Aidid's group who were fighting against Siad Barre's and later Ali Mahdi's armed groups). In the following quote he also depicted his attitude towards the leader of his group: "*we just respected him and I don't understand why we respected him*".

These five participants' experiences reflected many of the recruitment experiences raised in the literature review. All of their stories varied, although some of them had experiences in common, such as involuntary or voluntary recruitment; separation and loss of family, a social aspect which seemed to affect their decision to join, an emotional component of the experience, etc. As a general feature of the phenomenon of child soldiery, the recruitment presumably applies for all child soldiers except for those who are born into an armed group. Next, we turn to the participants' training experiences.

#### ***5.4 Training and arms***

Training was an individual structural feature. Walter Ayala, Chris Black and Baziel all received military training. While Jean-Baptiste did not mention the topic<sup>53</sup>, Mohamed explicitly said that he did not receive any training, which supports the findings in the Africa Watch Committee & Physicians for Human Rights report (1992). Still, both participants were provided with arms, and it could be assumed that they both received some instruction on how to use these weapons even if done so informally.

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<sup>52</sup> A drug (Singer, 2005, p. 81).

<sup>53</sup> I did not ask the participant if he had received any training.

Walter Ayala received brief combat training and arms. *“The guerrilla trained us during a short period of time, how one acts in a front-line situation. [...] I was given an AK-47 gun, it was quite good and I felt good with it”*. Unlike the examples given in the literature review, Walter Ayala did not explicitly mention the power and status attained by carrying a gun. Even so, the gun provided him with a positive sense of self.

On the other hand, Chris Black who was also provided with arms and shown how to use them described the power that carrying a gun gave him in various situations during his time in the FLEC. People were forced to obey him; they were afraid of him. Besides being trained in the use of weapons, he was taught how to *“rob from people or beat (them), all kinds of bad things”*. The training also involved waking up *“at four o'clock in the morning...and run and carry a backpack that weighed a lot.”*

Baziel's training experience differed from the previous two participants'. Once he (and the other children) arrived in Ethiopia, they lived in a refugee camp until they were taken to military training camps. Contrary to the Children Rights Project and Human Rights Watch report (1994), which states that older boys were trained during three to four months and younger children only during school holidays, Baziel mentioned that older boys were trained for six months, while *“very small”* boys like himself were trained for three months. Baziel described the training as follows, *“You train how to shoot a gun, you train how to camouflage, you train how to detect the enemy... you were training all those kinds of things as a normal military personnel.”* After they had been trained they returned to the refugee camp. The participant described the life they led in the refugee camp as a *“double life”* because they had to conceal the fact that they were trained child soldiers from the humanitarian agencies providing them aid. *“It was only a secret that is between the SPLA and us and the Ethiopian government”*<sup>54</sup>. With a *“double life”* he meant that they had to take on adult responsibilities and lead a military life *“sandwiched with continuous hard labor, subjection to military regulations and punishment”* while pretending outwardly to lead a *“normal”* civilian childhood. Part of the hard labour, which actually could be classified as child labour, included building the seasonal housing and classrooms and even

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<sup>54</sup> In practice, they were able to keep it a secret from the humanitarian agencies because their *“day to day management was handled by Sudanese and Ethiopians who in reality collaborated with SPLA”*. Furthermore, the children were not trained all at once but in groups. So, while one group was being trained in the military camp, the rest of the children were in the regular camp.

building houses for the teachers, who, in fact, were military officers. We will now turn to look at the participants' experiences of the armed groups' social control and their initiation and indoctrination practices.

### ***5.5 Social control, initiation and indoctrination***

All participants brought up the topic of their respective armed group's social control, while most of them also touched upon initiation and indoctrination strategies. Chris Black and Jean-Baptiste were both cut off from their families when abducted. Both also described the strict social control of their armed groups; attempts to escape were punishable by death. In addition, they were both physically indoctrinated. Jean-Baptiste was beaten during the abduction; while Chris Black recounted that he sometimes was badly beaten during his time in the FLEC. Both were also forced to witness violent acts. All of these strategies are intended to make children compliant to the armed group and insensitive to violence (Singer, 2005 pp. 71–72, 88).

Besides this, Chris Black mentioned other strategies that the FLEC employed in trying to cut off young recruits' family bonds. His experience resembled that of many former RUF child soldiers and their relationship to the commander, who acted as a father-figure to them and tried to replace the bond they had to their own father or family (Denov, 2010). When Chris Black was chosen to be the commander's bodyguard, he described that he was treated like the commander's own son. He was forbidden to go to war, which showed that he had special protection. Furthermore, he was allowed to shower and was provided with food, nice clothes and guns: *“In the beginning it was really good... They try to give you everything, so that you can forget your family”*. The participant also described formal meetings during which the leadership would lie to the young recruits telling them that their families were dead and that they were all alone in the world. The children were also given false promises: *“Here you are well, here you get all that you want... You can be like our own son.”* Amongst other things, the purpose was to prohibit the young recruits from escaping. Chris Black pretended to accept their word: *“Then I also just said 'I'm not going anywhere, I'm staying here with you'.”* He added that one was forced to accept their propaganda otherwise one would have been hurt. The participant used deception as a survival strategy to protect himself, just as other former child soldiers have (Denov, 2010, pp. 140–142). When the participant fell out of favor *“it was as if hell is better.”*



Chris Black was also forced to use drugs. *“I was little, I don't dare to beat people or steal, but they forced us to use marijuana. Because if I use marijuana, you don't remember what you do, you can steal anything...it's like you are drunk, you don't know anything”*. In another part of the interview he related that *“sometimes they forced us to use drugs or smoke something”*. Considering the strong effects described above (loss of memory, increased bravery, confusion, etc.) it is possible that they were forced to consume drugs stronger than or mixed with marijuana. So, Chris Black's experience of the FLEC's attempt to mold him into a committed FLEC soldier involved forced separation from family and community, strict social control, threats of punishments, physical indoctrination, special treatment by the commander (patronage, safety, nurturance, favor), certain licenses (clothes, food and guns), rhetorical persuasion/propaganda, false promises and drugs that desensitized him to theft and violence (see e.g. Honwana, 2006, p. 59).

In Walter Ayala's case, his whole family joined the FMLN, but he did not mention in what capacity the others served in the *guerrilla*. It seemed, however, that the participant's brother was a combatant, too. On one occasion, Walter Ayala crossed paths with his brother in the mountains. The brother encouraged him to continue fighting to fulfill his mission, despite his fear, until the war was won. This implied that he too was part of some combat group. Furthermore, it implied that they were not part of the same group but had been separated from each other. This (as we will see in Baziel's case as well) is a means of loosening the social bonds to one's family while simultaneously strengthening one's commitment to the armed group. Walter Ayala also described the strict social control that he was subjected to; for example, he was prohibited from seeing his family.

Another strategy that the FMLN utilized in order to make Walter Ayala loyal to them was the desensitization of negative emotions as the following extract illustrates:

*“[t]he [f]irst time we fought against the military my best friend was murdered, he died in my arms, he asked me to help him but I couldn't do anything... But now there [w]as no time to cry, no time [t]o be afraid, there [w]as only time [t]o fight against the [e]nemies and win the power. We left my friend's [b]ody there on the ground and [c]ontinued.”*

This extract revealed not only the helplessness that Walter Ayala experienced at the loss of his best friend but also his suppression of sorrow and fear as well as him being ideologically indoctrinated (separation between the in- and out-group and there only being time to fight for the *guerrilla* cause, see e.g. Singer, 2005). Referring to the participant's encounter with his brother in the mountains, the form his brother's encouragement took could also be described as indirect ideological indoctrination, for he was repeating *guerrilla* doctrine. Despite the *guerrilla*'s desensitization strategy, the next quote demonstrates that the participant found a way to express his sorrow in secret, in this way resisting the system (Denov, 2010, pp. 129–130):

*“After X months I got the news that my brother...had been murdered and I asked my commanders to let me go home to my family but I couldn't. There was no time for sensitive people in the guerrilla. I couldn't cry in the day, [i]n the nights I lay with my head close to the ground and cried because I couldn't meet my brother ever again. Never. I understood nothing.”*

This sad episode once again brought up the themes of death, loss, social control, emotional numbing and Walter Ayala's own emotional struggle, confusion and loss of understanding.

Akin to Jean-Baptiste and Chris Black, Baziél was also cut off from his family when recruited. Once conscripted, the SPLA used a similar strategy as the FMLN and did not group relatives, such as cousins, in the same group. According to Baziél, the recruits were randomly grouped and when they arrived at the military training camp they were regrouped again. This process occurred more than once: *“we were mixed in many times. So you keep on making new friends and meeting new people like that.”* This seemed to have been an SPLA tactic to simultaneously loosen (and replace) family ties with new social bonds based on comradeship. It seemed to have worked as well, for as Baziél described it: *“those people remain your friends, your brothers, your everything”*. To further bolster in-group solidarity Baziél described how the child soldiers: *“were not allowed to talk to any outsider except when permitted by the authorities and in their presence...you are guided on what to say. In general we were oriented to treat outsiders as potential enemies of our fundamental cause... opening up to an outsider about who we are and what we do was considered a treason worth of capital punishment.”* This last extract illustrates the extreme social control imposed on the children. It also strongly reflected the

political indoctrination and threats of punishment that the children were subjected to. They even had to perceive aid workers or any of the civilians as potential members of the enemy/out-group. This type of social isolation serves to make children even more compliant to an armed group (Maxted, 2003, p. 61). Later on in the interview, Baziel once again raised the theme of social control. Similarly to Walter Ayala, he was not granted permission to see his family because of his combat duty.

Mohamed's experience was contrary to all of the other participants' experiences. There was no social control: "*Sometimes you can leave... Nobody watches if you are present or not.*" It appeared that everything was up to Mohamed: "*Sometimes I'm at war, sometimes robberies, sometimes at home, sometimes [watching] movies*". Unlike Chris Black, he voluntarily used drugs (*khat*), but the effects were similar: "*It makes the fear disappear... it makes you forget why I'm here in the war*"<sup>55</sup>. When Mohamed reflected further upon his past behavior he wondered whether the food was drugged, too, since to him, his past behavior did not make sense.

The topic of social control could be assumed to be relevant for the vast majority of child soldiers who are not born into an armed group. The latter category may, however, not perceive it as relevant since they do not know of any other reality than that of the armed group and, therefore, would have no particular desire to exit the group. Considering the participants' descriptions, it is interesting to note that all of them either were forced to use or, in Mohamed's case, voluntarily employed some strategy which enabled them to cope with the military life and violence they experienced during their time in the armed group. In the next section we look at the participants' roles and tasks within the armed groups.

## **5.6 Tasks**

All participants described their individual tasks in the armed group or the tasks that the armed group was involved in. This general feature could be presumed to apply to all child soldiers (except for infants). Mohamed took part in armed combat, but unlike many armed groups, the USC seemed to have no social structure or military regulations. The military life as depicted by the participant instead seemed to have been rather chaotic: "*There was no*

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<sup>55</sup> Mohamed mentioned that adults who participated in the war also used drugs other than *khat*.

*particular...commander... Nobody commanded 'you go here, you go there'. No...you have your own hiding place from where you shoot". Even Mohamed Farrah Aidid, who sometimes visited the military camp, did not order anyone to go to war, but according to the participant, "everybody went...when the truck left, you jumped on board". Each group (Mohamed's group consisted of "close neighbors, friends and acquaintances") had their own chauffeur and the participant described that when you heard someone yell "departure" you just jumped into the military vehicle that took you to the front-line. The goal was to push the enemy forward and take control over the city. Besides armed combat, Mohamed described having guarded who came in and out of the military camp. His participation in the war also gave him opportunities to lead a criminal life outside of the armed group. The participant mentioned that he and his friends used to rob people and empty houses when they were not fighting. For example, he described how they would wait somewhere at sunset and then threaten the passerby: "Do you want us to kill you or will you bring us money?"*

When talking about killing, Mohamed gives contradictory information. At one point he stated, *"Personally I didn't kill anyone, like, right in front of me, but I shot straight [to] where the other group was... I don't know if someone got hit or not."* However, at a later point when describing life outside the military camp he stated, *"I fear no one. The same when someone has used drugs, he is fearless...He makes no sense, but just kills if someone answers a stupid word or if someone does bad. Let's say like a wild... animal, for example, a lion... If someone comes against me, I kill him."* This extract depicts the participant's violent and impulsive behavior and his lack of tolerance to anything that went against his own will and desires.

Baziel's experience of life in the armed group was contrary to Mohamed's experience. As we saw in the previous sections he was subjected to strict military regulations, for the SPLA had a clear hierarchical structure complete with military ranks. According to Baziel, he was not an active combatant during the time he lived in the refugee camp in Ethiopia. Things, however, changed with the fall of Mengistu's government and the Ethiopian civil war. The SPLA was then forced out of the country back to Sudan. During the flight, the SPLA had to confront antagonistic Ethiopian forces who were much better equipped. For the participant this meant taking part in battle and facing various challenges and losses. Back in Sudan, the participant described how they were attacked by the Sudanese government and forced to flee from one town to another

until many of them, the participant included, fled to Kenya. This is similar to the experiences of many former SPLA child soldiers (Children Rights Project and Human Rights Watch, 1994). Due to the hardships that Baziel faced in Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya and his commitment to the SPLA and its cause<sup>56</sup>, he decided to voluntarily return to Sudan and join the SPLA in recapturing the towns they had lost to the Sudanese government. In Sudan, he was retrained and took part in armed combat. During this time, Baziel was also promoted to the rank of corporal in command of thirty-two child soldiers, who were around the same age as him (for similar reports see e.g. Denov, 2010, p. 113). As a commander part of Baziel's tasks included to: *"monitor them [the other child soldiers], the way they are fighting, how they are fighting... We will receive orders from above... but still, I will command these people."* The participant stayed in Sudan for some years before temporarily exiting the armed group.

Walter Ayala was also a combatant. He described the physically straining activities involved, such as walking for four days and four nights and taking part in daily combat against the military. Besides this, he mentioned challenges posed by the environment and the unequal position between the two armed groups fighting. *"They [government forces] had much better weapons. They received help from the USA, 1, 5 million US Dollars per day, for the war."* The fact that the enemy had bombers and tanks affected where they fought and for how long and also led to heavy losses. Walter Ayala's experience of life in the *guerrilla* was very different from his positive recruitment experience: *"in reality nothing was fun, nothing was so easy."* Besides multiple losses, he experienced extreme fatigue and even suicidal thoughts: *"I could not do it anymore. Sometimes I wanted to shoot myself, so that I would be with my friends, but I did not want to hear any more shooting, no more sounds of guns."*

For Chris Black, life in the FLEC consisted of various tasks. As mentioned previously, he was chosen to be the commander's personal bodyguard. He also described being a messenger for the commander, for example, telling villagers that the commander would come and that they were forbidden to leave the village until he arrived. He would also spy out if a village was safe

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56 Some of the hardships that Baziel described were dependence on humanitarian agencies, hunger due to having to survive only off of the food rations, hostility and armed violence by the local community, etc. Concerning his commitment to the SPLA's cause he stated, *"I was very bitter now. I see myself that I can do anything to change the situation in Sudan...I saw what happened in my country and then what I'm getting... about to get in to. And then I feel that [it] is time to maybe go back and contribute something."*

for the commander to visit. Other tasks involved looting and “*captur[ing] people, [new recruits], in a village, and if nobody want[ed] to come you ha[d] to beat them real bad.*” Drugs enabled him to commit those violent acts. Chris Black, however, also recounted times when he disobeyed orders, concealed information from his comrades and showed compassion towards victims: “*Sometimes I saw a small boy, the same age as me... I said, 'shh, hide under the bed'. Then my friend asked, 'Well, is it empty?' I said, 'Yes, there's only a woman in there. Go to the next apartment'... I would never want to hurt such a small boy. They are so young*<sup>57</sup>.” Besides capturing new recruits, the participant also had to capture young girls for the commanders (see the section on sexual exploitation for more about the last mentioned issue).

Jean-Baptiste mentioned having been a regular soldier during his time in the UPC, not a commander with particular licenses. According to him, carrying arms automatically made you a soldier. He also described an event during which he was sent to a village as a spy. Similarly to most other participants, he too seemed to take part in combat: “*I marched to many villages in Zambia... to go there and do warfare*”. His descriptions of the tasks, however, are very general, as if he was referring to tasks performed at a group-level: “*Then you go do [...] massacres*” and in relation to attacking and taking over some towns he mentioned: “*It was not easy. You cut people with machetes.*” It is difficult to determine whether the participant had to commit these atrocities since he also mentioned: “*I cannot do this bad thing. I was present, but I don't do anything. I don't do anything bad to anyone*” and again “*Me, I didn't loot*”. Nonetheless, he was forced to witness brutal acts which seemed to have deeply impacted him. Similarly to Walter Ayala, Jean-Baptiste also described challenges posed by the natural environment and strenuous activities he had to partake in, such as, walking for two weeks or even two months if ordered to do so while carrying heavy loads. The subsequent section concerns sexual exploitation, which was another individual structural feature found in the sample.

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<sup>57</sup> Honwana (2006, p. 65) gives a similar example of a child soldier resisting the armed group's authority by showing mercy to civilians.

### ***5.7 Sexual exploitation as victim, witness or perpetrator***

Three participants brought up the topic of sexual exploitation. Jean-Baptiste described boys being the target of sexual exploitation (rape) in the UPC: *“If the commanders are in need of women and they don't see any women... 'You, come'. They make love to you in your buttocks... I was there too, I know”*. This implies that the participant himself may have been sexually exploited during his time in the UPC. At the very least, he was a witness to the sexual exploitation of males and perhaps even females.

In the FLEC girls and women were sexually exploited. While Chris Black mentioned that he was not interested in girls at his age, he described how he sometimes had to capture young girls for the commanders when there was a celebration. The young girls were then forced to dance throughout the night. When the celebration ended each commander took one girl and slept with her. He further described how he sometimes experienced helplessness in these kinds of situations: *“sometimes you just hear them [the girls] in there crying, screaming...but you cannot do anything”*. The girls were sent back to their villages the next morning. According to the participant, however, babies were also born into the FLEC.

Contrary to the other two participants, Mohamed described an event during which he and his friends (altogether, five or six boys) attempted to rape an older girl from the neighborhood in the dilapidated house where they used to stash their weapons and money. He recounted that they had no guns at the time only smaller weapons like knives, but *“if we then had guns with us we...would've succeeded”*. As he related the scenario, *“When we caught the girl...the girl screamed and when she screamed I got scared that the girl recognizes me... and then we let go and ran away.”* Following this event, Mohamed asserted that he did not attempt to rape anyone else. Although Walter Ayala and Baziel do not mention the topic of sexual relations, it could be presumed to be a relevant topic within an armed group since sexual relations can also be prohibited in some armed groups (see e.g. Veale, 2005).

### ***5.8 Exit out of the armed group***

All of the participants exited the armed group in one way or another. Sent on a mission to spy out a town that the UPC intended to attack, Jean-Baptiste decided to escape the UPC. Despite the horrors he faced as part of the armed group, he still seemed to experience some kind of guilt for having escaped: *“It’s not my fault. It is you [referring to the commander] who sent me there. Me, I made my way, I escaped... God helped me”*. Even though he did not explicitly reveal anything about his affiliation to the UPC in the interview, it could be assumed that some of the group’s indoctrination tactics employed to instill loyalty to the group were, at least, partially successful. Just as suddenly as he was forced into the group, Jean-Baptiste departed it.

Chris Black also escaped, but it was unplanned: *“I was training in the morning, but I was without weapons. I was about two kilometers away from the military camp. Then we just heard... a bomb or something...but nobody dared to go back to where we used to live... We escaped from there, me and four others the same age as me.”* He continued to describe how they were captured by government armed forces (the enemy) who had attacked the military camp. It is interesting to note that, for the first time during the interview, the participant explicitly referred to the government armed forces as the 'enemy'. He might, however, have perceived them as the out-group (and a threat) all along, because of their attempt to kill his father and their harassment of his family. His reference to them as the enemy could be an indication that he, in some ways, began to socially identify himself with the FLEC (recall Tajfel and Turner’s, 1986, SIT). The participant was imprisoned for four days, during which he was interrogated, tortured and forced to do hard labor. While the participant mentioned how he lied about his affiliation with the FLEC, the interrogators knew he was a soldier because of his appearance (uncut hair and smelly, dirty, old and torn civilian clothes). The evening before the enemy was going to execute them, the participant and the three other captives made a daring escape when cutting fire wood in the forest. Two guards, however, noticed their escape, chased them and shot at them. One of Chris Black’s comrades was hit and screamed for help, but nobody dared to return. The three remaining children scattered, and Chris Black described how he ran for *“hours”* without stopping. When the world started spinning, he noticed that he was in pain and his body was covered with blood, yet somehow he managed to find his way to the home village. As with Jean-



Baptiste, Chris Black's exit out of the armed groups was also abrupt. For Chris Black this episode meant danger, imprisonment, physical abuse and labor, the loss of a friend, the struggle to survive, and physical injury.

Similarly to Chris Black, Walter Ayala's group was also attacked by government forces: “[O]ur commander was killed and the whole group scattered. I was lost, I didn't know where I was, all alone in the mountain. I sat quietly a whole night.” Walter Ayala managed to reunite with his particular group, but before then word reached his mother that he had been killed in battle. When she found out that he was still alive, she requested that he be sent home immediately and “*they did. They let me go home.*”

Baziel's exit differed somewhat from the other participants'. His temporary exit out of the SPLA was connected to a military mistake, during which the enemy recaptured the town that the SPLA had just captured. This event led to the participant and the other soldiers living underground for a year: “*it's very difficult to stay for a year in that kind of situation. You are not fighting so that you can move here and there and you are not doing anything. But you are there, you are watching the enemy... I become paranoid. I become like very intense. I just need to fight. 'If I'm not fighting, what the hell am I doing here?'*” This extract illustrates that combat was central to his identity as a soldier. While other soldiers might have seen this time underground as respite, the lack of combat gave him too much time to reflect on and question his role. The decision to take leave of active military duty (so that he could study) was basically made by his commanders but came in the form of a recommendation. He took their advice and completed his schooling. Later on he was offered higher training within the SPLA: “*I just accepted but... I was not okay with the idea.*” Like a good soldier Baziel's obedience to the military's leadership overrode his own volition. However, after being trained for some time he decided to escape. This time his own needs and wishes overrode the group's needs.

In line with much of Mohamed's previous descriptions, there was no clear exit out of the armed group. It seemed that his participation in the armed group ended when the war ended. We next turn to the period following the exit from the armed forces.

### ***5.9 Reintegration into civil society in the home or neighboring country***

All of the participants, except for Jean-Baptiste, returned to civil society for a period of time (several months for some) before they sought refuge in Finland or Sweden. Similarly to the period prior to them becoming child soldiers, this stage was also connected to their child soldier experiences either by contrasting with their experiences in the armed force or by illustrating their difficulties in reintegrating into civil society. After being reunited with his mother Walter Ayala asked her for assistance to attend school *“because I wanted to be someone...I didn't want to fight with weapons any longer. She answered that the opportunity of the Poor only was with weapons. Studying in school was for those who have money... ‘I can [w]ork and make money for my studies and for my family,’ I said. She just cried.”* During this phase out of the guerrilla, Walter Ayala faced many hardships related to employment (such as being exploited and physically abused at work) and not being able to attend school, but he was determined. In the end, he managed to work and to attend school. Contrary to the time in the FMLN, he described himself as *“happy. I bought milk every month for my little sister and was able to pay half of the school [fee] ... Now I was fighting for my dream. I wanted to become a lawyer, a good lawyer who would defend the rights of the people.”* Considering this phase in Walter Ayala's life, it diverged from the perspective held by some researchers (e.g. Garbarino et al., 1991), that former child soldiers continue to act in a violent manner after exiting an armed group. Also, unlike other former FMLN child soldiers in Dickson-Gómez's (2003) study, he did not begin to sustain himself through illegal means even during his challenges in finding employment; neither did he mention that his difficulties were caused by him having been a child soldier. Instead of acting destructively, Walter Ayala demonstrated pro-social behavior. He was motivated to fulfill his vision, but *“[i]t did not end up so easy.”* In the next section, we find out how Walter Ayala's life was once again turned upside down by violence putting him on the path to Sweden.

The central meaning of Baziel's time as a civilian was receiving an education. Similarly to Walter Ayala, he showed determination and successfully completed his education with good grades. Baziel did not describe having any difficulties in reintegrating into civil society.

For Mohamed there was no clear separation between his life in the armed group and his life in civil society. As mentioned above, he was able return home while still being an active child

soldier. His home life was, however, characterized by family strife and anger management issues. From the beginning of the war, Mohamed had disobeyed his family who disapproved of and were concerned about his participation in the war. The participant also described the continuous fights he had with his older brother: “[he] sometimes sees that I don't carry a gun... [he] sometimes yells and then we fight... Then dad always say[s] ... 'give the boy peace'. Because otherwise if I get angry, dad is afraid that I [will] shoot [my] big brother.” He described how neighbors were also afraid of his unpredictable behavior: “nobody makes me angry, because I don't realize”. It seemed that the participant acted impulsively when he was angry and had no inhibition to kill. Mohamed's aggressive behavior revealed that he had difficulties in adjusting to regular civilian life while he was still an active combatant. Following the end of war, Mohamed and his family fled to Ethiopia where they lived for several months before they came to Finland. This was an overall negative experience for the participant, during which he experienced various hardships (an arduous journey to Ethiopia, constant family strife, hostility and harassment by locals, etc.). It also meant losing the exciting lifestyle he once had: “I did not have a boring time in [Somalia].” However, before migrating to Finland, the participant returned to Somalia for many months after several abortive attempts to escape from his family<sup>58</sup>. This phase, additionally, illustrated the participant's difficulties in reintegrating into civil society, for upon arriving in Somalia, he returned to the lawless lifestyle he led as part of the USC: “we [had] guns...[and did] nothing else but robberies of empty houses and eating khat, seeking women, going to the movies.” This lasted for a period of time until he was brought back to Ethiopia from where he and his family eventually traveled to Finland.

Upon returning to his home village, Chris Black described that he was warmly welcomed back by his family who arranged a small celebration for him. Both he and his family expressed joy at being reunited. While family acceptance is a crucial step in assisting former child soldiers' reintegration process, this might not always be the case as we saw in the literature review. Despite some positive experiences at the outset, the participant was constantly forced to hide in the forest since government forces continued to harass his family about his father's whereabouts. He described that he had no peace but perpetually feared that the armed group would find him

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<sup>58</sup> Every unsuccessful attempt involved attempting to steal money from his mother. He finally sold his good shoes and obtained the money he needed for the journey.

and punish him violently. He was exhausted of living a life in hiding and even expressed that he thought he should have stayed in the FLEC for the rest of his life. He continued to secretly smoke marijuana to calm his nerves, a practice which had been forced upon him when he was a soldier. Chris Black's period back home finally culminated in tragedy when government forces once again came looking for his father. From his hiding place under the bed, Chris Black heard the usual threats as they interrogated his mother, but this time when she answered their questioning in the negative they shot her dead. His siblings began to cry, and he came out of his hiding place only to be taken prisoner by government forces a second time. They sent his siblings out of the house and torched it. Amazingly, Chris Black managed to escape the enemy again and was reunited with his siblings. Following this event, the participant described that he and his siblings lived with a relative until the relative's passing. This whole period after his exit out of the FLEC was characterized by social isolation<sup>59</sup>, since he had to constantly hide in the forest excluded from normal village life. Additionally, he faced perpetual fear and insecurity, imprisonment and escape, multiple losses (family members, home), a second separation from and re-unification with his siblings and, finally, the possibility of being uprooted from his home country.

Contrary to the rest of the participants, Jean-Baptiste was the only one who arrived in Finland only a few weeks following his escape from being a child soldier in the UPC. This meant that he never had the opportunity to reintegrate into civil society, after having been part of a ruthless, militaristic group, in his home country. While the feature described in this section was an individual structural one for this sample; the following feature, refuge in the West (a Scandinavian country), though, was a general one.

### ***5.10 Refuge in Finland and Sweden***

Three of the participants (Jean-Baptiste, Walter Ayala and Baziél) were explicitly forced to migrate to Finland or Sweden because of their past membership in an armed group. Walter Ayala, for example, described how his life suddenly changed in an unexpected direction. When

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<sup>59</sup> An experience that other former child soldiers have described upon their return to civil society, see e.g. Corbin (2008); Wessells, (2009).

he was still a school boy, his friend disappeared and was found tortured and murdered by the death squads because of his family's past involvement in the *guerrilla*. Soon after his friend's death Walter Ayala himself received a letter in which he was threatened because of his family's participation in the FMLN: “[W]e will finish all of you, we will start with you. Next funeral will be your own”. [T]he letter had blood also. ‘This blood is your friend's blood, do you know how much fun we had with him?’” This death threat was the exact reason for seeking asylum in Sweden. On the other hand, Mohamed's and Chris Black's forced migration was not directly connected to them having been child soldiers; rather, it was connected to the political situation that made being a child soldier possible to begin with. Chris Black, for instance, described how he and his siblings had no one who could care for them in the village after the death of his relative. They received help from a church while they sought asylum in Finland. Recall that three of the participants already carried with them the experience of having been refugees. So for them (Walter Ayala, Baziel and Mohamed) this episode meant seeking refuge in a third or even fourth country. Walter Ayala explicitly mentioned, “*Now I was a [r]efugee again*”.

#### **5.10.1 Walter Ayala**

Walter Ayala's refugee experience began in uncertainty. He was once again abruptly and involuntarily separated from his family. Recall the military attack in his early childhood when he was suddenly separated from his family and forced to witness the brutal murders of his family members after which he was re-united with his mother and forced to migrate to Honduras. Similarly to then, the cause of him seeking asylum in Sweden was connected to actual murder, danger and threat, only that this time, contrary to his own expectations, he was forced to migrate on his own: “*I thought that the whole family would leave, but my mother said that they had much to do here [in El Salvador], the war had just ended and there was a process that they needed to be part of.*” Not only was he uninformed about the separation from his family, but also of the climate and the location of the country of destination. It was only after he made the journey “*of three long days*” to Sweden that he realized that his family “*was on the other side of the earth*”. Sweden is not just far from El Salvador geographically. While El Salvador is a “collectivist” culture, the Swedish culture is “individualist” (Hofstede Centre, 9.9.2014). The former means that social relationships and the group (e.g. the extended family) and one's membership in the

group are of great significance in El Salvador. On the contrary, the Swedish culture values the individual over the group and traits, such as being autonomous and unique, are particularly substantial (Masgoret & Ward, 2006, p. 65; Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk & Gelfand, 1995, pp. 243–244).

The distance between these two types of cultures could be illustrated in the living arrangements that the Swedish authorities provided for the participant. He described that upon his arrival in Sweden he was sent to a small town where he received a small apartment to live in. Living alone in an apartment is uncommon in some collectivist cultures, where a household might also include members of the extended family. This on its own could evoke feelings of isolation in people who come from such a culture, never mind someone in Walter Ayala's position, who recurrently had been separated from his family. (Recall that he was also prohibited from visiting his family while in the *guerrilla*.) Living in a small town in Sweden, where, presumably, there are not as many immigrants as in the cities could further have strengthened his feeling of alienation. Not being able to speak the language and a lack of social life ("*I had no friends*") would also have contributed to his feeling of loneliness. These are just a sampling of the issues Walter Ayala faced, that when combined, would culminate into the experience described in the following extract:

*"My First year in Sweden was the worst year in my life...It was like starting from the beginning. I understood nothing [...] I was confused. I felt all alone, I was sad and wanted to go home again."* And: *"I sat by the window and cried long hours. I wanted to be with the family in my country. It was so sad. It was the worst Christmas in my whole life."*

It may be difficult to fathom how someone who, as a child, lived through such horrific events in his home country could have described his first year in Sweden as his worst. While the uncertainty, confusion, loneliness, sadness, and homesickness listed in the extract above could be seen only as a result of acculturative stress (see Williams & Berry, 1991, p. 634), upon closer scrutiny, Walter Ayala's traumatic past seems to have played a prominent role. The recurring themes of separation, threat, violence, death, loss, and of abrupt refuge very likely affected Walter Ayala's experiences of that first year living in Sweden. His past experiences of trauma

in conjunction with the stresses of the acculturation process described above seem to have resulted in an amplification of trauma symptoms (Allen et al., 2006, p. 208). The acculturative stress seems to have increased also because of the forced nature of his migration, the cultural distance between El Salvador and Sweden and his initial experience of marginalization, etc. (see literature review).

Despite these challenges, the participant persevered. He was determined to learn Swedish, because he wanted to “*understand all who live here [Sweden]*”. His life took a positive turn once he had learned Swedish: “*Then I got to study with other children, Swedish children. I felt better, but I still had difficult times there too.*” The participant then continued to describe how he encountered racism<sup>60</sup>: “*I had survived worse situations in my country. I was not sad that they called me 'darky', but I did not like that they called me 'Devil'. I was no 'Devil', but a child that adults had sent to another country to protect his life.*” Still, Walter Ayala maintained his pro-social behavior even in the face of discrimination, contra the view that former child soldiers continue aggressive behavior in civil society. Walter Ayala's persistence produced results. He made many Swedish friends, but did not mention having had any El Salvadorian friends. Based on his descriptions, it appeared that he adopted assimilation as his acculturation strategy, which, while not as adaptive as integration, has been found to be fruitful under certain circumstances (Sam & Berry, 2010, p. 477.) Besides having a social life, Walter Ayala's faith in God also grew and may have been a means for him to deal with his traumatic past (Allen et al., 2006, p. 207). After several years, during which Walter Ayala established a new life in Sweden, he was deported back to El Salvador, despite his objections. He was once again uprooted, and his life was turned upside down. In spite of this, he showed thankfulness: “*God has blessed me every day of my life and that I have to thank him for*”. Walter Ayala also described endurance in the face of adversity, hope in the future, peace in his faith, a desire to help others who are suffering and a desire to work towards his goals.

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<sup>60</sup> Chryssochoou (2004, p. 50) defines racism as “discrimination based on the reification of race and the essentialization of racial differences”. According to her, race is socially constructed and the content of racial differences is dependent on the socio-political context. “Whatever the so-called essence of race, racism is based on the assumption that racial differences exist, are real and justified”. Racism, in turn, is linked to actions and behaviours. (Ibid., p. 50; see Chryssochoou, 2004, for a more detailed view of different types of racism.)

### 5.10.2 Bazel

Bazel described his first year in Finland similarly to Walter Ayala. For him, it was “horrible”, “totally lonely” and “cold”. Furthermore, he described it as “boring” and “totally opposite of the life that I have led”. These latter descriptions implied that his past in the SPLA was filled with social relationships (recall that he referred to his comrades as “brothers”) and excitement. Bazel had previously also been a refugee in Ethiopia and Kenya. While his time in Ethiopia was not characterized by “living a refugee’s life”, his experience of living in Kakuma refugee camp (Kenya) was. It was interesting to note that Bazel described the phase in Kakuma similarly to his life in Finland, in that life in Kakuma was “totally different from...the life we had in Ethiopia”, because he was accustomed to being “very energetic” and “do[ing] things”. In Kenya, on the other hand, he and his comrades lacked activities. A major difference between his time in Kakuma and his time in Finland is that, unlike other former child soldiers who experience a loss of important friendships and community upon exiting the armed group (Denov, 2010; Veale, 2005), it seems that Bazel only experienced this loss when arriving to Finland. He never mentioned having felt lonely in Kenya, while in Finland: “I didn’t have much friends”. His feeling of loneliness also seemed to have been further amplified by his encounter with a new culture, language and people<sup>61</sup> (Allen et al., 2006). People behaved differently from what he was used to: “the community was just very quiet... I was kind of shocked to see people who do not respond to people. Sometimes you see people running away from you when you wanna ask some assistance.”

Another thing that stood out in Bazel's case, in particular, was his encounter with Sudanese from the north, that is, members of the enemy that he fought against as a child soldier: “They were not my friends and that made it difficult for me to, like, interrelate with them.” These conflicting relationships most likely increased his feeling of isolation even further. Eventually, though, Bazel's attitude towards the north Sudanese changed, because he came to understand that “our fundamental differences are based in discriminatory policies employed by the government at home which are coded with religious misinterpretation” and that “interrelations based on personal grounds should be given a chance. That’s how my general perception of

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61 Sudan is not included in the Hofstede Centre's country comparison, neither is the DRC or Somalia. These cultures are, however, most likely collectivist, whereas the Finnish culture is individualistic. (Hofstede Centre, 9.9.2014.)



*Muslims enemies changed to seeing them as brothers from Sudan who are affected by the same problem ('war') as me*". Baziél also described himself as currently being active within the Sudanese community in Finland. This example depicts how he was able to solve a conflicting situation, during which he earlier presumably would have applied violent means, in a peaceful way. It also shows growth and maturation.

Baziél described growing accustomed to life in Finland, and he became "*a different man*". Similarly to Walter Ayala, he demonstrated a sense of purpose: "*I knew what I wanted and what I wanted is to go to school*." He also developed an active social life with friends from all over the world (including Finns and Sudanese) and described his present life as "*full of fun*". Based on the participant's descriptions and his attitudes, both towards Finns and Sudanese, it seemed that he had integrated into Finnish society (Sam & Berry, 2010). While very committed to his home country ("*I would like to still contribute to the building of the new nation as I had contributed to its liberation in the past*"), he also expressed commitment to Finland ("*I hope that I will also do something in Finland*"). It was interesting to note Baziél's ideological commitment to the SPLA and to his home country throughout the whole interview. It appears that ideological commitment acted protectively for him when coping with his war and resettlement experiences (Lustig et al., 2004, p. 28).

### **5.10.3 Mohamed**

Mohamed traveled to Finland with his family. In contrast to both Walter Ayala and Baziél, Mohamed continued to show similarities between his past behavior and his behavior in Finland. He described himself as still being "*a tough guy*" and added that one of his brothers as well as a relative understood him and left him in peace. His relationship with his family members had not changed either: "*when we have fights at home I leave and come to my [relatives]*". He continued to live partly at home and partly elsewhere (e.g. with relatives and friends). Furthermore, he described his home life as "*boring*", a term he used to describe his past experience of being a refugee in Ethiopia. Mohamed told of occasionally being involved in gang fights between Somalis and Finns. He also described that he was expelled from school because he did not do his homework; this resembled his early behavior in Somalia, during which he used to skip

classes. Both of the two previous experiences reflected his continual difficulty in reintegrating to civilian life.

Some of the difficulties that Mohamed described seem to have been more connected to the acculturation process than to Mohamed's past as a child soldier: *"I got a Finnish girlfriend...My family prohibited me from being with her and I left the girl."* Contrary to his past behavior, the participant, in fact, showed obedience and respect for his family's values. After some time passed though, Mohamed began dating Finnish girlfriends again, but *"I became a bit more adult... I don't anymore tell... where I am and what I do"*. According to Sam (2006, p. 405) immigrant adolescents seek independence and are also more involved with/directed towards their friends and with members of the opposite gender. Immigrant parents, however, are usually stricter in relation to dating than are other parents in the West. The pressure that parents and friends pose on the adolescents are often conflicting, which makes it challenging for them. (Ibid., p. 405.) While Mohamed mentioned that he had Finnish girlfriends, he did not mention having had any other Finnish friends. The fact that he took part in gang fights against Finns illustrates his strong commitment to his own ethnic group<sup>62</sup>. His descriptions suggest that he adopted some form of separation as his acculturation strategy (Sam & Berry, 2010).

After a brief stint in prison, Mohamed described that his life changed. He related that he no longer fights and described himself as being peaceful. His present life revolved around work, family and helping people. Nevertheless, he provided some contradictory information, which makes it difficult to determine whether his behavior, in fact, had changed: *"If I now went back to Somalia, I would not carry weapons. And I would not talk to anyone who is stupid, because I know what is born out of that- fighting. He kills me or I kill him... Then his clan and my clan begin a war again."* Considering Mohamed's overall experience following the end of war, it is quite clear that he struggled to reintegrate into civil society. Some of the explanation for the participant's behavior could lie in his personality since he described being rebellious even before the war broke out. Participating in armed conflict could have reinforced this sort of behavior because he enjoyed its fruits. The above mentioned extract could, however, only relate to how

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62 According to Liebkind (2006, pp. 78–79) ethnicity refers primarily to a sense of belonging to a specific group that has, or is assumed to have, a common ancestry or origin. The two main elements of ethnicity are history and culture.

he would behave in his home country and not in Finland, whose legal system and cultural norms differ. It may very well be that it took being imprisoned to make that clear and that his behavior actually did follow suit.

#### **5.10.4 Chris Black**

Chris Black's life in Finland bore many resemblances to his life in the home country: "*When I came to Finland, I thought that all my things would go well here, but it continue exactly the same way*". Although he described his first year and the first time he saw snow as positive experiences (contrary to Walter Ayala and Baziel), his life in Finland was full of hardship. The hopefulness reflected in the extract above and his positive experience in the beginning may relate to him having been relieved and optimistic about having left behind such a difficult past, that is, until he realized the adversity facing him in the new society of settlement (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008, p. 322). The challenges he faced were connected to his process of asylum (Ehnholt & Yule, 2006, p. 1197). First he described how frightened he was when first encountering the Finnish police<sup>63</sup>, for they reminded him of the government soldiers who murdered his mother. Recall the loss of trust in "authority figures" that child soldiers may experience as a result of them being perpetrators of violence (Lustig, 2004, p. 26). This distrust and fear of authorities along with his unfamiliarity with the Finnish bureaucratic system affected his choice of concealing his past as a child soldier from immigration authorities. He believed that they might imprison him for the rest of his life.

While the participant repeatedly sought asylum, he kept receiving negative decisions. This meant that he was constantly living under the threat of being separated from his family (a recurring theme throughout his life) through deportation back to his home country. This also led him to hide from the authorities in order to stay in Finland: "*because I'm afraid, if the police catches me, if I go back to my home country, if they see me there, they can kill me.*" He managed to evade authorities for several years, but: "*life became similar to when I was in the home country, hiding almost all the time in the forest.*" It seems that escape and evasion continued to be his default strategies to survive and could be seen as skills that he learned as a child soldier. This also coincides with his past resistance to authority (recall e.g. the time he showed mercy

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<sup>63</sup> In Finland the asylum application is submitted either to the police or the passport control officer.

on civilians). A result of him having to hide from the authorities further meant living in isolation outside of normal society: *"I can't go to school, I can't do anything... I can't go anywhere outside... I just hid."* Despite these circumstances, he still described having learnt Finnish and having a social life.

Overall Chris Black's life in Finland was characterized by constant disappointment, insecurity, instability and continual waiting. Another resemblance to his past, was his occasional drug use. However, his life, finally took a positive turn. The second time I met the participant, he had received a positive decision and described his happiness about this and added: *"Now I don't have to fear anything here... Now I can live like everybody else. Earlier it was really difficult, but now everything will surely go well."* He was finally able to step out of the marginalizing claimant period and begin living a normal life (Berry, 1991).

#### **5.10.5 Jean-Baptiste**

Out of all the participants, Jean-Baptiste appeared to be going through the most difficulties. Despite his thankfulness towards Finns in general and some individuals in particular from whom he had received help and for being able to be in contact with his mother, he described his experience of living in Finland very negatively. Throughout the interview, but particularly in his descriptions of his life in Finland, there was a deep sense of despair: *"What I do... I eat, I live a normal life. I wait for the day... I will die, but that's all. As for me, I have already quit everything."* Of all the participants, Jean-Baptiste was also the only one who described witnessing massacres during his time in the armed force as well as the rape of boys by members of the armed group. In fact, he even implied that he had first-hand knowledge of the sexual abuse. In addition to this, he fled from his home country immediately after his escape from the UPC, which meant that he had no period of adjustment to civilian life or time to cope with his traumatic experiences in his own cultural setting before arriving in Finland. Instead, he had to deal with both reintegration and trauma within an unfamiliar setting. As has been shown above in Walter Ayala's case, acculturative stress intensifies the symptoms of trauma and, perhaps, even the other way around. The hardships he faced in Finland related to his difficulties with language acquisition which in turn effected his education and employment opportunities; his dependency on the social welfare system and his experiences of racism.

Against his background as a child soldier, his loss of education figured prominently (recall that some former child soldiers experience the loss of education as what has impacted their lives the most, Annan et al., 2009). Compared to former child soldiers in their home countries, though, Jean-Baptiste encountered additional challenges, since he had to acquire a new language, one that he greatly struggled with, in order to be able to study. While Jean-Baptiste acknowledged that he had the ability to attend university, his limited Finnish kept him from this opportunity. Furthermore, he described how regulations set by the employment office pushed him into specific lines of work: “[As a boy] I did not know that I would lead my life like this, that I would have no higher degree... I thought that I would be someone, that one day I would work in a higher [position], not in a low position like this.” Not being able to master the language, thus, hindered Jean-Baptiste from getting a higher education and better occupation, dashing his childhood dreams (for now).

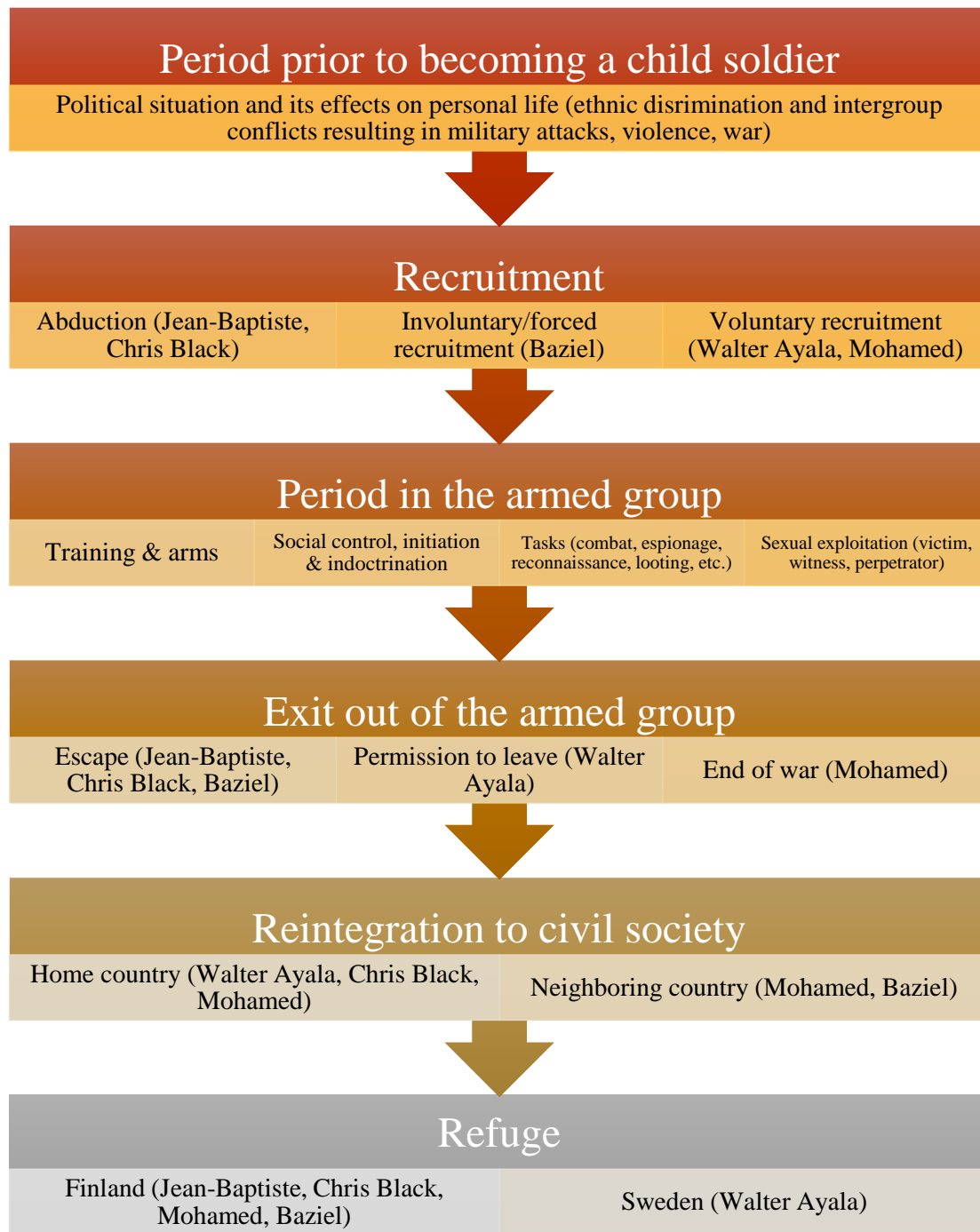
At work the participant also described having experienced discrimination, in the form of insults and mistreatment, because of his “ethnic distinctiveness” or “visibility” (in this case, being 'black') (Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000, p. 2). The experience of discrimination on its own impacts the well-being of immigrant adolescents negatively (e.g. Gil et al., 1994) and can evoke feelings of being an outsider for members of ethnically visible groups (Pentikäinen, 2005). In Jean-Baptiste’s case, it could moreover have strengthened the deep sense of insecurity that he experienced as a member of the UPC, where he was constantly surrounded by threats and brutality (Allen et al., p. 208). Although he accepted the racism as a given (“*Since I am black, I always accept [it]*”), he described how he finally chose self-respect over financial security: “*I want to [rather] be poor [than] they start treating me like a dog... The day that I die, I do not need to bring the money... where I go. I will go as I was born.*” Jean-Baptiste related how he was currently still unemployed. The next quote exemplifies his hopelessness and lack of control in relation to this: “*If I don't find a job, I cannot do anything... I can sit at home and eat this wall.*”

In addition to this, and unlike the other participants, Jean-Baptiste did not mention having any friends. While he appeared to identify with other Africans, it was more so because he felt excluded by Finnish society: “*I am African, even though I have changed nationality... but I cannot change skin color.*” Similarly to Chris Black, Jean-Baptiste also expressed his distrust of

the police (Lustig et al., 2004, p. 26). Let us briefly consider Jean-Baptiste's experiences in light of the HRVs framework described in Chapter 2 (Allen et al., 2006). It seems that part of Jean-Baptiste's acculturation experiences (racism, lack of social life) affected his "attachment" negatively, which had already been damaged by the multiple losses he had had to endure. The threats of racism and his lack of trust in the police could also have affected his "safety" by increasing his insecurity. Furthermore, his struggle with the language and his dependency on the welfare system may have had a negative impact on his autonomy and resulted in a lack of control ("identity-role system"). The experience of not being in control but being forced to do things against his will was already a major theme which had been repeated various times throughout the participant's life (forced separations from family, abduction, forced migration, etc.). It is possible that Jean-Baptiste had not yet been able to deal with his traumas, which, in turn, had a negative effect on his language acquisition (see Allen et al., 2006, p. 207). However, below we will see how he may have dealt with some of his traumas through his faith in God ("existential meaning").

Taken together, the participant's description of his time in Finland was characterized by vulnerability, alienation, and marginalization. Furthermore, he was most likely still dealing with the severe traumas that he experienced as a child soldier. In spite of all of this, he did not act aggressively, destructively, or illegally but instead mentioned a desire to get along with others. While he respected all people, he only feared God. Similarly to Walter Ayala, his faith in God seemed highly significant to him. He described that his existence was not mere chance but was God's will; so, he was waiting upon the Lord to show him his way. He expressed his wish to help others in despair. One could perceive a glimmer of hope when he said that he believed he would be someone in life, that God would open a way for him to lead a normal life, for he was no longer a soldier but, rather, a "*normal person*".

Figure 4: Structure of the phenomenon of child soldiery with additional information



## **6 Discussion and conclusion**

Giorgi's (2009) approach proved to be fruitful for studying the experiences of former child soldiers. In combination with Wertz's (1985; 2005) adjustments, it facilitated the organization of their experiences and the discovery of a structure which reflected both their common experiences and their individual structural features. It is interesting to note that all of the participants did indeed have experiences in common, despite them originating from different countries and having served in different armed groups. In fact, most of the temporal and thematic features described in the structure were general and applied to all participants. Only three of the features (training experiences, sexual exploitation and reintegration into civil society in the home or neighbouring country) were individual structural features, which nonetheless applied to a minimum of three participants. This means that although there was much divergence in the data, it all fit into one overall structure ("intrastructural variability"). I did not have to write separate structures to describe the phenomenon under study, thus, the description of the structure is more general. (Giorgi, 2009, p. 191.) Many of the features in this general structure pertain to other individuals who have lived through the same experience of child soldiery. In the next section, I will describe an ambiguity I found in Giorgi's approach and consider the limitations of this study and the reliability of the data.

### ***6.1 Research limitations***

Giorgi's (2009) approach is strictly descriptive and follows Husserl's (1913/2004 pp. 100–101) main principle of not going beyond the description by imposing interpretations on the data. Even so, the researcher is advised to make explicit what is implicit and taken for granted in the participants' descriptions. To me, this was somewhat confusing. For example, Chris Black did not explicitly mention that he lost his home and family when he was abducted. Nevertheless, his abduction implicitly meant separation from home and family. On the one hand, this could be seen as going beyond what is presented in the data and as such, even be viewed, in some way, as an interpretation of the data. On the other hand, the participant described that he was physically taken to the FLEC's military camp on his own. He makes it clear that his family was not present with him but still in his home village. So, in a way he implicitly described being



separated from his family. Perhaps the question here is to what extent the researcher is allowed to make explicit what is implicit in the participants' descriptions without it being classified as interpretation.

The aim of the data collection was to gather rich and concrete descriptions (rather than opinions and attitudes) of the research-significant experiences (Giorgi, 2009, p. 96). Atkinson's (1998; 2002) life story interview permitted me to do this. One factor, however, which affected the descriptions, was the fact that the participants and the interviewer did not share a common native language. Recall that the interviews were conducted in Finnish, Swedish, English *and* French. While some participants expressed themselves very clearly and had no difficulties in speaking a non-native language, others were clearly struggling. As for me, it was also easier to communicate in, for instance, English than in French, although I speak both languages fluently. This obviously affected the communication between participants and interviewer. I had difficulties in understanding some of the participants' descriptions, while they, too, sometimes had difficulties in understanding me. Jean-Baptiste's interview, which was conducted in both French and Finnish, was the most challenging one. Although there were challenges in communicating, a positive factor was that there was no need for an interpreter. Using an interpreter would have posed different challenges in relation to reliability. The fact that I speak several languages and am familiar with different accents was also an asset in conducting this study.

Giorgi's (2009, p. 96) approach allows for both written and oral descriptions to be gathered. My primary aim was to conduct oral interviews with all participants, but in one case this was impossible since the participant currently lives in El Salvador. Obviously, one could argue that it is impossible to combine oral and written descriptions, since, for instance, an oral description requires the participant to be spontaneous, while a participant who writes down his or her description has more time for reflection and can change the content of the description to his or her own advantage. This could, therefore, lead to a discrepancy in the data and impact the results of the study. In reality, though, a participant can also change the content, by adding or subtracting certain details, for example, in an oral interview, although it would be more challenging. In the end, it is the participant who decides what to bring up and what not to; this also depends on the audience they are addressing (a subject which will be discussed below). Most importantly, my

aim from the beginning was not to make any existential claims about the participants' experiences but to view them as their *experiences*.

Another issue when conducting oral interviews is that the researcher also has access to the participants' nonverbal behavior such as facial expressions and tones of voice. These many times reveal aspects that are invisible in written descriptions, but drawing conclusions based on body language, for example, would go against Husserl's (1913/2004) main principle. It is a different matter if the researcher only describes that the participant raised his or her voice and became emotional when relating a particular event. In transcribing the interviews I considered these aspects, but they were not significant or revealing in the case of the four participants with whom I conducted oral interviews. Therefore, I did not add these aspects into the results.

In considering the combination of oral and written descriptions, both are linguistic forms of expression and both appear to the researcher's consciousness through language. Returning to the El Salvadorian participant, I considered it a richness to include his written account in my study. Some of his descriptions were deeper than some participants' oral descriptions in that they revealed very sensitive experiences in detail. The difficulty in finding participants with this background also impacted my decision to include his written interview<sup>64</sup>.

Overall, there are several factors that could influence the reliability of the participants' descriptions. For one, I was a white female and a member of the ethnic (Finnish) majority interviewing members of ethnic minorities from patriarchal societies. These relations could have had an influence on what they chose to reveal/conceal. They might have brought up different issues had the interviewer been a man from their own home country. For instance, the sexual violation of females could be a sensitive topic for a man to reveal to a woman, in particular. In Mohamed's case, he might have chosen to conceal that he and his friends actually raped the girl, yet, the fact that he described their attempt to rape her, in addition to his honesty about his criminal behaviour both in Somalia and Finland implies that he was being authentic. While the participants most likely did not disclose everything and would not even have been able to, during

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<sup>64</sup> Another factor, which could be discussed in relation to Walter Ayala, was that he, unlike the other participants, now lives in El Salvador. His experience of being deported could have colored his descriptions of his life in Sweden in a negative way. However, the participant also described many positive experiences he had during his time in Sweden. Therefore, it seems that his descriptions were authentic.

such a short amount of time, it seems that they were quite honest in their descriptions (consider e.g. the descriptions of their tasks in the armed group). In the case of Jean-Baptiste, though, it is difficult to ascertain what in fact took place because he gave very general descriptions and also mentioned not having partaken in violent acts. Considering the viciousness of the armed group it could, however, be assumed that he was forced to commit some of the atrocities described. Denying that he committed those acts could, in this case, have served as a coping strategy for him. Returning to the fact that I am a member of the ethnic majority, I nevertheless differ from the majority because of my own background of having been born and raised in Africa. This aspect might have had a positive impact on the participants, in that I was familiar with Africa from where the four interviewees originate.

Besides this, the reliability of the data could have been influenced by the participants' memories. Human memory is fallible, and we have a tendency to be forgetful as time goes by. The traumatic nature of the participants' experiences might also have impacted their memories. For example, in his description of the military attack Walter Ayala mentioned that he did not remember so many details but only remembered being reunited with his mother. This particular aspect, however, concerns all research around memories. Although one's memories would not be completely accurate, it does not change the meaning that one applies to the experience in the present.

## ***6.2 Summary of the results in relation to previous research and recommendations for future study***

We begin by taking a look at the overall structure and the meaning that the phenomenon of child soldiery had for these participants. The primary purpose of my study was to find out how the five participants described their experiences of having been child soldiers and their experiences of having lived in Finland or Sweden. I first assumed that these two experiences would form separate structures, but, instead, I found that the phenomenon of child soldiery itself was directly or indirectly connected to their refuge in the two Nordic countries. For all participants, child soldiery was an experience which evolved through time. Essentially, there was a period before they became child soldiers, which more or less contrasted with their life in

the armed force. Next, there was the period of time when they were active within the armed group and, then, a period following their exit out of the armed group, during which they reintegrated into civil society and forcibly migrated to the West.

The experience of being a child soldier was also very complex and had multiple meanings for all the participants. To begin with, all participants were personally affected by intergroup conflicts and war, some more violently than others. These circumstances led to them becoming child soldiers either abruptly (Chris Black, Jean-Baptiste, Mohamed) or following a period of time (Baziel, Walter Ayala). The recruitment signified the moment when they became involved in the armed group, either voluntarily or by force. For Jean-Baptiste and Chris Black, the recruitment meant being surrounded by violence, death threats and fear. Similar findings have been reported by, for instance, Denov, (2010); Honwana (2006) and Trenholm et al. (2013). For Mohamed, Walter Ayala and Baziel the recruitment instead had a positive meaning (e.g. social relationships, education, revenge, excitement). Motives like these have been described in the works of Brett and McCallin (1995); Dickson-Gómez (2003); the Children Rights Project and Human Rights Watch (1994) and Rone (1995), etc.

While Walter Ayala and Baziel experienced positive emotions to begin with, they described experiencing very negative emotions later on. Recall Walter Ayala's depiction of his childhood being "*a hell of blood and suffering.*" Baziel, too, states, "*To me I haven't had a really good childhood ... I cannot talk of my childhood as others would talk of it, but it was quite dramatic.*" Chris Black, in contrast, experienced a positive phase later on, when he was treated favourably by the commander. For Mohamed being a child soldier seemed only to have a positive meaning, while for Jean-Baptiste only a negative meaning. Nonetheless, all participants attributed an emotional aspect to their experiences of being child soldiers, which coincides with results from previous studies on former child soldiers (e.g. Brett & McCallin, 1995; Denov, 2010).

For all the participants, the experience of child soldiery meant separation from family (in Mohamed's case it was voluntary), multiple losses (death of family members, friends, loss of home, school, home country, etc.) and other difficulties (e.g. lack of control, various dangers and insecurity, physically-straining activities, environmental challenges, refuge). These findings support the results found in other studies as well (e.g. Betancourt et. al., 2009; Denov; 2010; Singer, 2005; Veale & Stavrou, 2007). For some it also involved training experiences, while all

described some kind of initiation and indoctrination tactics forced upon them by the armed group (e.g. breaking of family ties, physical indoctrination, threat of punishment, suppression of negative emotions, drug abuse), or in Mohamed's case the use of drugs as a voluntary way of coping with war. There are striking similarities between these five participants' aforementioned experiences and that of other former child soldiers (e.g. Denov, 2010; Singer, 2005; Trenholm et al., 2012).

Part of the sample brought up the topic of sexual exploitation within the armed group, a subject described by, for instance, former LRA and RUF child soldiers (Denov, 2010; McKay, 2005). Participants in Denov's and McKay's studies, however, describe the sexual exploitation of females, not of males as Jean-Baptiste did. Although sexual exploitation of male child soldiers has been reported (e.g. Machel, 2001), I have found no such descriptions by former child soldiers in the studies I have read. One reason for this may be that boy soldiers who have been subjected to sexual exploitation conceal their experiences from others due to stigmatization or disgrace, yet Denov (2010, p. 125) found that both female and male participants in her study never had witnessed males being sexually exploited. Jean-Baptiste did not explicitly mention having been sexually violated but implies that he had first-hand knowledge. The cause of him being so vague could be related to his shame about the experience and the difficulty in telling the interviewer, an unfamiliar female member of the majority, about this experience. There is however a resemblance in his way of describing other experiences in the armed force. He uses the third person singular pronoun ("one", which can sometimes be used as a first person reference, such as "we"), the first person plural pronoun ("we"), and the third person plural pronoun ("they") seemingly as a linguistic means of distancing himself from the experiences he was describing. For example, when relating about his recruitment Jean-Baptiste described it in very general terms ("*they come and they rape...*"), immediately after he stated that this was how he himself was recruited. This linguistic strategy might feasibly apply to other descriptions as well. Researching the linguistic strategies of how former child soldiers' relate their accounts might be a fruitful line of inquiry in further understanding how they cope with traumatic issues, for example. More importantly, the fact that boys are also sexually exploited needs to be addressed and researched further to provide better assistance for them.

For all the participants being a child soldier meant carrying arms, taking part in combat, and/or various other tasks, such as guarding, spying, looting, seizing new recruits, etc. None of these tasks were novel but have been described by e.g. Machel, (2001) and Singer, (2005), etc. They all experienced violence in one way or another, as witnesses, victims and/or perpetrators. Sometimes their experiences included all three aspects, which was the case for Jean-Baptiste and Chris Black. These findings also support previous studies (e.g. Bjørkhaug, 2010; Veale & Stavrou, 2007). Considering the participants' group memberships in the armed force in light of SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), Walter Ayala seemed to identify positively with the FMLN and its cause when recruited. While Chris Black perceived the FLEC negatively at first, he later on seems to have begun to identify with the armed group to some degree. Although Baziél was not informed about the circumstances to begin with, he later became very committed to the SPLA. Jean-Baptiste instead seems never to have begun to identify with the UPC, although he implied that he felt guilty for escaping. Though Mohamed does not make explicit reference to the importance of clan membership, he was willing to fight and, possibly, kill members of the out-group.

While all participants exited their respective groups, for some it was a clear attempt to break with the military life they had led (Chris Black, Walter Ayala, Jean-Baptiste). Mohamed's exit was not so clear, while Baziél exited the SPLA temporarily before, in fact, escaping at a later point. Most participants returned to civilian life in their home or neighbouring countries, only Jean-Baptiste fled to Finland from the DRC immediately after escaping from the UPC. Baziél, too, came to Finland shortly after having left the SPLA but had lived in civil society prior to then. Mohamed and Chris Black had difficulties in reintegrating into civil society (e.g. continued drug abuse, criminality). While Walter Ayala described various difficulties he faced in the aftermath of war, this period in his life was mainly signified by work and education. For Baziél education was central during his reintegration into civil society, as well. The participants' exits out of the armed group and their reintegration experiences (such as, fear of being recaptured, social isolation, exploitation, unemployment, etc.) also coincide with findings from other studies (e.g. Annan et al., 2009; Betancourt et. al., 2008; Corbin, 2008; Denov, 2010; Honwana, 2006; Peters & Richards, 1998; Santacruz and Arana, 2002; Wessells, 2009).

Out of the five participants' experiences of child soldiery, Mohamed's was the most atypical case. His experience deviates from that of previous studies on former child soldiers. For example, instead of having to obey military rules and regulations in a strictly hierarchical military fashion, he seemed to enjoy his own freedom and independence in relation to his movement in and out of the armed group and so on. Contrary to order and discipline, his life in the armed group was characterized by chaos. This is in consensus with the Africa Watch Committee & Physicians for Human Rights report (1992), according to which children who took part in the war between General Mohamed Farrah Aidid's and Ali Mahdi's forces were not trained or disciplined. The report states that the boys joined the armed groups partly for the purpose of entertainment and danger, which seems to have been the case for Mohamed, too. Besides the aforementioned report, I have, unfortunately, not found any other studies conducted on former Somali child soldiers in the USC. One explanation for the freedom that the children had could be that only adult soldiers were subjected to military regulations, while child soldiers were not. As Mohamed mentioned, children at that time were not forced to join, but neither were they prohibited from partaking in battle. This could be seen as the weakest form of incorporation of child soldiers in an armed group. Whereas in the case of Walter Ayala children were allowed to join voluntarily yet were trained as if they were adults. As a matter of fact, the war in El Salvador was to a large extent fought by children, especially on the side of the government armed forces (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008). In Baziel's case, although children were not physically coerced into the armed group, their parents were obliged to send their sons to become soldiers. The armed groups that Jean-Baptiste and Chris Black belonged were the most unscrupulous in the way they recruited children and exploited them. These "levels" might form part of a larger typology of how armed groups incorporate children as soldiers. Here might be an area of future research within social psychology and related disciplines.

For all five participants the experience of child soldiery was connected to seeking refuge in one or more countries. Walter Ayala, Baziel and Mohamed had all been refugees in their neighbouring countries in their past and, interestingly, had some experiences in common from this period of time in their lives, such as, discrimination and hostility by locals and the lack of

activities<sup>65</sup>. Other studies (e.g. Annan et al., 2009; Corbin, 2008) show similar findings in relation to former child soldiers' lack of activities in refugee camps.

For Baziel, Jean-Baptiste and Walter Ayala the forced migration to Finland or Sweden was directly related to their past membership in the armed group, while for Mohamed and Chris Black it was indirectly related to their child soldier experience. Nevertheless, their lives in Finland or Sweden were connected to their past child soldier experiences in that it illustrated that some of them still struggled to reintegrate into civilian life (Chris Black and Mohamed). In fact, the lives of both Mohamed and Chris Black resembled their past lives in their respective home countries. This is a very interesting finding, which could be studied further in the future.

For many of the participants the encounter with a new culture mainly amplified the traumas they had experienced as child soldiers (e.g. separation from family, various losses, lack of control over their lives, dependency, etc.) (Allen et al., 2006, p. 208). For Baziel and Mohamed this period, instead, contrasted sharply with their past; for example, both described their lives in Finland as boring to begin with and as such different from their past. In addition, Baziel seemed to experience a loss of social relationships and community that he had had in the armed group, which led to him feeling very lonely in the country of settlement.

Out of the participants' experiences of intercultural contact only one topic was mentioned by all participants— school/education. For some, education had a positive meaning (Walter Ayala, Baziel). This supports what, for instance, Betancourt et al. (2008) found in their study. According to them education can be an advantage for former child soldiers' reintegration into civil society in that it improves their self-esteem (as was the case for Walter Ayala) and for building friendships (both described by Walter Ayala and Baziel) (ibid.). In this case, the same seems to apply to former child soldiers' adaptation to a new cultural setting. Their experiences of education is, however, very much related to how well they master the language of the new, host country or are able to study in another language in which they are more fluent, such as English or French. Mohamed's and Jean-Baptiste's experiences of education were negatively described (e.g. although Jean-Baptiste valued education, his language inefficiency limited his educational and employment opportunities). Other experiences described by the participants

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<sup>65</sup> Dependency upon international organizations and lack of food was also reported by Baziel (for similar reports see e.g. Annan et al., 2009; Corbin, 2008).



were related to their process of asylum (Ehnholt & Yule, 2006, p. 1197) and, in Chris Black's case, the fear and insecurity of not knowing whether he would receive a permanent residence permit or not (Allen et al., 2006, p. 208), the living conditions in the host society (Ehnholt & Yule, 2006, p. 1197), the cultural distance between the home country and the country of settlement (Berry, 2006, p. 50) and acculturative stress (Williams & Berry, 1991, p. 634).

All participants brought up aspects of their social lives in the new host society (loss and separation from family and home country, social isolation and exclusion, racism, social relationships to members of their own ethnic group, the ethnic majority, and other ethnic groups, etc.) The acculturation strategies adopted by the participants when adapting to life in Finland/Sweden seemed to vary between all four strategies of assimilation (Walter Ayala), separation (Mohamed), integration (Baziel) and marginalization (Jean-Baptiste). Chris Black was extremely marginalized in that he was completely isolated and excluded from normal life during the period of time he was hiding. (Sam & Berry, 2010.) While for most of the participants life took a turn towards the better, it did not for Jean-Baptiste. One reason for this could be his traumatic experiences while in the UPC, a group associated with reports of cannibalism, torture and mutilations in Ituri (ICC's legal landmark; Thomas Lubanga found guilty of using child soldiers to rape, murder, 15.3.2012). Although Jean-Baptiste did not mention these sorts of atrocities, he did mention massacres and brutal forms of violence (cutting up people with machetes). This, in combination with the fact that he had to struggle to adapt to civil society in a foreign culture, could help explain why he experienced such hopelessness. A topic for future research could be to compare the experiences of former child soldiers who have reintegrated into civil society in their home countries and the experiences of those who immediately after having exited an armed group have fled to the West *and* have to reintegrate into an unfamiliar civil society.

Some ways in which the participants coped with their traumatic experiences, both in their home countries and the new country of settlement, were through their faith in God (Jean-Baptiste and Walter Ayala) and/or through ideological commitment (Baziel) (see Allen et al., 2006; Lustig et al., 2004). Some of them also mentioned that they try to cope with their past by forgetting their experiences. For example, Walter Ayala mentions the following: *"Part of my own therapy is to continue not to remember everything that happened, despite this, everything is in my*

*thoughts and comes out every now and then*”. Similarly, Chris Black mentions that he is tired of thinking about all the bad things that happened to him; all he wants is to forget. Corbin (2008, p. 328) and Honwana (2006, pp. 138–139, 150–156) both discuss how the Western practice of psychotherapy for dealing with trauma, in which talking about the trauma is encouraged, may, in fact, be counterproductive in other cultural settings (e.g. Africa, Latin America and South-East Asia) with their own healing practices. This is an issue that needs to be addressed when helping former child soldiers who have fled to a Western country.

The results in this study also show serious gaps in the immigration policies and bureaucracies in both Finland and Sweden. For example, in Walter Ayala’s case it seems that the decision-makers did not consider his background and the threat his life could have been in when deporting him back to his home country. Furthermore, they did not consider what was best for him as a child, who had already once been uprooted from his home country and lived in Sweden for a significant amount of time. In the case of Chris Black, one issue stands out which should also be dealt with in the reception of asylum seekers and refugees. Chris Black concealed from the authorities his past as a child soldier because he feared that revealing his past would have negative consequences for him. In order to assist former child soldiers in the process of healing it would be of great importance that they were able to reveal their past in safe and non-judgmental surroundings. Other areas of future research related to child soldiery, could include how former child soldiers’ experiences differ from that of other refugees’ living in the West. This study showed that former child soldiers, similarly to other refugees, experience difficulties arising from the acculturation process, yet, there are those, like Mohamed and Chris Black, whose lives in Finland bore a striking resemblance to their past. Other groups whose experiences would be very relevant to study are former *female* child soldiers living in the West, children born into an armed group, and ex-slaves. According to Fegley (2008) children in Sudan are still exploited as slaves. In comparison with child soldier programs, ex-slave programs have received less attention and less funding (ibid., p. 48–49).

To conclude, let us consider the five participants’ experiences in light of the media and policy portrayals described in the introduction. Recall that former (male) child soldiers have been depicted either as victims, perpetrators or heroes. However, according to Denov their experiences often comprise features from all three types of portrayals. (Denov, 2010.) This

pertains to most of the participants in this study as well. For example, Chris Black described all three aspects. During the period of time he spent in the FLEC he was a victim of violence and subjected to beatings, yet he also perpetrated violence when capturing new recruits. When he disobeyed orders and showed compassion towards young victims he proved his heroism. The fact is that they all survived and are attempting to move forward with their lives peace by peace.

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## Appendix A

### Definitions of “Childhood” and “Child Soldier”

#### A Cultural and Historical Perspective

Who is a ‘child’? The answer to this question may seem very clear to many of us. In the West, children are mostly perceived to develop through certain distinct phases where age is often used to demarcate the crossing line between childhood and adulthood (James & James, 2012; Honwana, 2006, pp. 40–41). Historically, this was not the case, though. As the historian Philippe Aries (1982, pp. 157, 167) argues, the concept of childhood did not even exist in medieval times. Once children were not dependent on their mother’s care, they entered into the adult world and were not considered different from adults. Age became a defining feature of childhood only in the 1800’s. (Ibid.) While this pertains to contemporary Western societies, age is still not used to distinguish between childhood and adulthood in many other places around the world. Instead, other factors such as communal roles, expectations and duties are used to describe who is considered an adult. Many girls, in particular, who are expected, even at the age of 13, to marry and bear children are seen to have reached adulthood, while other children are expected to take part in domestic work and/or the economic support of the family<sup>66</sup>. (James & James, 2012, pp. 7–8; Honwana, 2006, p. 41; Twum-Danso, 2005, p. 12; Leão, 2005, p. 31.) Not only is childhood defined differently in various socio-cultural contexts, but even within the same society there may exist various definitions of childhood simultaneously. Criteria like social class, economy and gender can play a role in defining who is considered a child and/or an adult. There are also inconsistencies in how different institutions (e.g. legal or welfare ones) in the same society define the concept<sup>67</sup>. The meaning of childhood has changed and continues to be altered throughout time. (James & James, 2012; Denov, 2010, p. 2; Honwana, 2006, pp. 41–42.) Nevertheless, all societies make a distinction between childhood and adulthood and have different ways of demarcating the change from one phase to the other (Honwana, 2006, p. 42).

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<sup>66</sup> This is contrary to the situation of numerous children in Western middle-class families today, who, instead, often receive support from their parents beyond the age of 18 (Honwana, 2006, p. 41).

<sup>67</sup> I will discuss some legal definitions of “childhood” and “child soldier” in the next section.

“At its simplest, childhood is understood as the early phase of the life-course of all people in all societies. It is characterized by rapid physiological and psychological development and represents the beginning of the process of maturation to adulthood” (James & James, 2012, p. 22). The change from childhood to adulthood often takes place over a period of time, and it may involve the performance of rituals (Honwana, 2006, pp. 42–43)<sup>68</sup>.

Let us now turn to the term of “child soldier”. In present-day societies children are viewed as innocent, weak and reliant upon adults to guide and nurture them. Soldiers, on the contrary, are seen as strong, aggressive, mature and accountable adults. While children are in need of shelter and security, soldiers ought to safeguard others. Combining the two terms is contradictory and disturbing. Child soldiers find themselves placed in-between these two positions. They have not yet developed into mature adults, yet they have to carry out adult duties. Their innocence is taken away from them, and for those who carry guns and are qualified to kill, it means that their childhood is taken away from them, too. (Honwana, 2006, p. 3.) While various expressions have been employed to define children actively involved in armed conflicts, such as “child soldier” and “children associated with armed forces”, none of them describes the lives of these children satisfactorily (Denov, 2010, p. 2). Denov (*ibid.*) points out that the term “child soldier”, nonetheless, manages to capture the contradictory features discussed above associated with a child’s innocence and violent wartime behavior. Using this term, however, gives rise to the difficulties discussed above in relation to defining the concept of childhood.

The term “soldier” is also not so clear-cut. When we think of soldiers we tend to think of well-trained military men in uniform. This picture also clashes with the reality of many child soldiers, who seldom receive adequate training nor wear uniforms. (Honwana, 2006, pp. 51, 53.)

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<sup>68</sup> Amongst a social group in Angola, for instance, rituals are seen as part of children’s development during which they acquire knowledge about moral issues and duties (Honwana, 2006, pp. 42–43). Let us briefly consider the perception of children’s participation in war. Many of us would probably argue that it is morally incorrect for children under 18 years of age to participate in war. It is interesting to note that children’s participation in war may be perceived negatively even in communities where childhood is defined in relation to communal roles instead of age. This was the case in Honwana’s (*ibid.*, pp. 42–43, 54) study of child soldiers in Angola and Mozambique. Many adults who belonged to the aforementioned Angolan social group perceived children’s participation in armed forces as disrupting their development since they had not passed the initiation rites of adulthood before they were forced to join an armed force (*ibid.*, pp. 42–43, 54).

Often, these children are used to “fill the ranks of guerilla and rebel-groups” (ibid., p. 51). Since the term “soldier” is often associated with masculinity and fighting, it also fails to include girls, women and those who carry out activities other than fighting in armed forces. In this case, the term “children associated with war” could be more appropriate because it manages to refer to the many tasks that children carry out in armed forces. At the same time, it is insufficient in that it lacks a clear reference to the active role that children play in today’s wars. (Denov, 2010, p. 3.)

Denov (2010, p. 4) discusses another tricky matter in using general definitions. When naming all children in armed forces, e.g. “child soldiers”, one overshadows their multifaceted and personal experiences. Even though all child soldiers might have some experiences in common, their experiences may still vary greatly. Consider, for example, a nine year old girl, who has been abducted into a rebel group in Congo and a seventeen year old boy connected to a military group in, e.g., France. (Ibid., p. 4.) Another difficulty in employing broad definitions is that one classifies people into categories. As a consequence that specific category will be in focus while other ones will be peripheral or even excluded. This gives a one-sided picture of something that, in reality, is extremely complex. Considering the participants in my study, for instance, they once were children actively involved in armed forces. They could therefore be referred to as “former child soldiers”. However, they are no longer children *or* soldiers. Even if the word “former” refers to their past, the whole term conceals where they are in their lives now.

At last, Denov (2010, p. 4) also raises the important question of whether children participating in organized armed groups or gangs, in, e.g., Brazilian *favelas*<sup>69</sup>, should be considered child soldiers. They could be argued to be child soldiers since the definition of a child soldier<sup>70</sup> includes children involved in *any* armed groups. Still, I consider it more appropriate to make a distinction between children actively involved in, e.g., state armed forces or armed opposition groups and children involved in criminal organizations. Using the term to refer to children in all armed organizations, military, criminal, or otherwise, would, in my opinion, add more confusion than clarity to the concept.

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<sup>69</sup> Slums

<sup>70</sup> See Appendix A for more on the legal definition of a child soldier as stated in the Paris Principles.

Having discussed several ambiguities associated with defining both “childhood” and “child soldier”, I briefly want to explain my own definitions of these concepts. I utilize age as the marker between childhood and adulthood, and I consider a child to be under 18 years of age according to the legal definition of a child discussed in the introduction. Despite the many shortcomings of the term “child soldier”, I have chosen to use this term in my thesis. Firstly, when comparing the terms “child soldier” and “children associated with armed forces”, I consider the latter term to be very vague. It does not express in what way the children are associated with an armed group. To me, they might as well be linked to an armed group through family, e.g. if they are in favor of one army due to their father serving or having served in that particular army. When I hear the term “child soldier” though, I think of a child who currently serves or has served as a soldier in a military force during his or her childhood. I do not discount the ambiguities mentioned above connected to the term, but akin to Denov (2010, p. 2), I think that it holds in it the opposing aspects of being both a child and a soldier. Although many of us tend to link the word ‘soldier’ to battle and men in uniforms, most of us know that a soldier can have other tasks than just seeing combat. Women are also able to join the military in many countries<sup>71</sup>. These aspects also hold for child soldiers. Furthermore, I have decided to refer to the participants in my study as “former child soldiers” because the specific life-experience of having been a child soldier is the main focus of my thesis. I analyze how the participants experienced being soldiers in their childhood and how this experience impacted on their later lives. Even if I use this term, my aim is not to classify them as one and the same but to view their unique personal and complex experiences in relation to each other. I also recognize their present roles and other life-experiences. We will now turn to look at the terms discussed in this section from a legal point of view.

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<sup>71</sup> Just to mention two examples, women are able to join the army in Finland, while in Israel it is compulsory for them to serve in the army.

### A Legal Perspective

In the preceding section we came to the conclusion that there is no universal socio-cultural definition of childhood. Legal definitions of childhood tend to vary as well and blur into intermediate concepts of, e.g., “youth” and “adolescence” (Denov, 2010, p. 3). According to Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 1989, “*a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier*” (United Nations in Saulle & Kojanec, 1995, p. 10)<sup>72</sup>. This convention has been signed by all UN member states (193 states in total). All parties, except for two, have ratified it<sup>73</sup>. Angola, the DRC and El Salvador have all signed and ratified the UNCRC in 1990. When South Sudan was part of Sudan proper, Sudan signed and ratified it in 1990. Currently there is no information on whether independent South Sudan has signed or ratified the UNCRC. This means that the participants from these home countries were considered children by law when they became part of an armed force. Considering the participant from Somalia it is more ambiguous since Somalia has signed the Convention in 2002 but not yet ratified it. (James, & James, 2012, pp. 110–111; UNICEF, 2007, p. 36.) It is, however, possible to question the sincerity of the rest of the aforementioned countries’ ratification of the UNCRC, as well. While many African nations, for example, the DRC, have signed the UNCRC, they have not signed or ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), which was adopted in 1990 and defines a child identically to the UNCRC. (Twum-Danso, 2005, .p. 10–11). Twum-Danso (ibid.) raises the interesting question of whether there is “a hierarchy of legal instruments”, suggesting that some legal documents might carry more weight than others. Moreover, he asks whether governments and other non-state bodies consult the views of the populace. (ibid.). Taking into account the variety of socio-cultural perceptions of childhood presented in the previous section, it is likely to assume that not all sectors of a population

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<sup>72</sup> While a child is defined as anyone below 18 years of age, the United Nation’s World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond (1995, p. 7) defines *youth* as of age 15–24. The various definitions of youth and adolescents may be confusing. I will not discuss them in my thesis, since distinguishing between the various overlapping definitions would only complicate matters further and, in fact, would have no significance for my paper. For those interested in finding out more about these definitions, see e.g. Denov (2010, p. 3).

<sup>73</sup> Somalia and, interestingly, the United States of America have not ratified the UNCRC.

necessarily agree with the legal statement, which is a definition based on age<sup>74</sup>. These questions are not so simple to answer but deserve to be mentioned for the reader's awareness. Still, the age limit of 18 years can therefore be viewed as the main legal regulation defining childhood. (UNICEF, 2007, p. 36). So, even if the cultural notions of childhood may vary in the participants' home countries, all of their home countries have more or less agreed upon the age limit of 18 for defining a child. Hence, I will employ the definition of a child as stated in Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) in this study.

Let us now turn to the legal age of recruitment into armed forces. The fact that the phenomenon of child soldiery has gained increased international attention has also led to the development of various laws concerning children in armed conflicts. Most of these laws have been constituted to regulate the recruitment and employment of child soldiers wherein the main attempt has been to raise the minimum age of military recruitment. (Happold, 2005, p. 1.)<sup>75</sup>

Although many countries have adopted the UNCRC, the legal age of recruitment into armed forces may still be below 18. The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocols of 1977 are the main legal instruments intended to protect children in armed conflicts. The Additional Protocols of 1977 state that the minimum age of recruitment into an armed force is 15. Since the Additional Protocols came into force a number of legal instruments have, however, raised the minimum age of recruitment to 18 years. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict of May 2000, for instance, bans compulsory recruitment of those under 18 years old as well as their involvement in armed conflicts. The protocol also urges states to raise the age of voluntary military recruitment. (UNICEF, 2007, pp. 39–46.)

According to the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008, the DRC has ratified the Optional Protocol in 2001; the age of voluntary recruitment in the country is 18. Somalia has not ratified the Optional Protocol, and there is no information available on the age of voluntary or compulsory recruitment in the country. In Angola, men can be voluntarily recruited

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<sup>74</sup> Whether those in power hold the same view is another question. Do they settle on authorizing the convention due to international pressure or coercion perhaps?

<sup>75</sup> For more on child soldiers and international law, see e.g. Happold (2005). He devotes a section/chapter to discussing the conditions under which child soldiers are considered responsible for committing war crimes, (*ibid.*, pp. 141–159).

at the age of 18 and women at the age of 20. While the minimum age of compulsory recruitment is 20, Angola has also agreed to the Optional Protocol in 2007. In Southern Sudan, a child was defined as any person below the age of 18 in 2005 and two years later, in 2007, the recruitment of children was prohibited. In El Salvador, the age of voluntary recruitment is 16 and compulsory recruitment 18. The El Salvadorian government ratified the Optional Protocol in 2002. (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008, pp. 46, 106, 135, 305, 315–316.) Considering these facts, *at the time* it may not have been against the law for some of the participants in my study to be recruited into armed forces at a younger age than 18. In fact, only one participant became a child soldier *after* the Optional Protocol had been ratified by the government in his home country. Let us turn to the legal definition of a child soldier. In “The Paris Principles” (2007, p. 7) a child soldier is defined as “any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities.” The Paris Principles refer to “armed forces” as military forces connected to a state, while defining “armed groups” as distinct from armed forces of a state according to Article 4 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (2000, p. 238). This is the definition that I utilize in my thesis.



## Appendix B

### INTERVIEWS WITH FORMER CHILD SOLDIERS (poster)



Hei, Nimeni on Carita Orengo. Olen suomalainen, mutta olen syntynyt ja kasvanut Afrikassa (Kongo-Kinshassa). Muutin Suomeen 14-vuotiaana. Opiskelen tällä hetkellä Helsingin yliopistossa ja yritän tavoittaa yli 18-vuotiaita entisiä lapsisotilaita, jotka ovat asuneet Suomessa tai Euroopassa muutaman vuoden. Haluaisin haastatella heitä pro gradu – tutkielmaani varten. Haastattelukysymykseni ovat hyvin avoimia ja koko heidän elämäänsä kattavia. Voisin tehdä haastattelut suomeksi, ranskaksi,

englanniksi, swahiliksi, ja/tai ruotsiksi, osallistujan oman valinnan mukaan. Jos Sinulla on tällainen tausta ja olisit kiinnostunut tietämään haastattelusta lisää, ota mielellään minuun yhteyttä. Kiitos.



Bonjour, Je m'appelle Carita Orengo. Je suis Finlandaise, mais je suis née et j'ai grandi en Afrique (au Congo-Kinshasa). Je suis rentrée en Finlande quand j'avais 14 ans. Pour le moment, je fais mes études à l'Université d'Helsinki et j'essaie de trouver d'anciens enfants soldats, qui ont plus de 18 ans et qui ont vécu en Finlande ou en Europe pendant quelques années. Je voudrais faire des entretiens avec eux pour mon mémoire. Mes questions sont ouvertes et elles concernent leur vie. Je pourrais mener les entretiens en français, anglais, swahili, finnois et/ou

en suédois, selon la préférence du participant. Si vous avez vécu une telle expérience et vous voudriez savoir plus de l'entretien, j'apprécierais si vous me contactez. Merci.



Hi, My name is Carita Orengo. I am Finnish, but I was born and I grew up in Africa (the DRC). I moved to Finland when I was 14 years old. I am currently studying at the University of Helsinki and am trying to find former child soldiers, irrespective of gender or country of origin, over 18 years of age who have lived in Finland or Europe for a few years. I would like to interview them for my master's thesis. My interview questions are open-ended and concern their whole lives. I could conduct the interviews in English, French, Swahili, Finnish, and/or Swedish, according to the participant's own wish. If you have this background

and would want to know more about the interview, please contact me. Thank you.



Jambo, Jina langu ni Carita Orengo. Ninatoka Finland lakini nili zaliwa na kuishi Afrika (Congo-Kinshasa). Nimekuja Finland kama nilikua na miaka mi 14. Sasa nina soma katika chuo kikuu ya Helsinki na ninajaribu ku tafuta watu juu ya miaka mi 18 ambao wamekaa Finland au Ulaya miaka kadhaa na ambao wamekua wanajeshi kama walipokua watoto. Ningetaka ku fanya mahojiano (intavjuu) nao kwa tasnifu yangu. Maswali yangu ni wasi na yanahusu maisha yao nzima. Ningeweza ku fanya mahojiano kwa Swahili, Kifaransa, Kiingereza, Kifini na/au kwa Kiswedish, kama mtu mwenyewe anapenda. Kama wewe ni mojawapo wa hawa na kama ungetaka kujua zaidi, ninakuomba kunipigia simu. Asante sana.



Hej, Jag heter Carita Orengo. Jag kommer från Finland, men är född och uppvuxen i Afrika (Kongo-Kinshasa). Jag flyttade till Finland, då jag var 14 år gammal. För tillfället studerar jag vid Helsingfors universitet och försöker få tag på över 18-åriga före detta barnsoldater, som bott i Finland eller Europa i några år. Jag önskar intervjua dem för min pro gradu –avhandling. Mina intervjufrågor är öppna och berör hela deras liv. Intervjuerna skulle jag kunna genomföra på svenska, franska, finska, engelska och/eller swahili, enligt deltagarens egen önskan. Ifall Du har denna bakgrund och skulle vilja veta mer om

intervjun, vore jag tacksam om Du kontaktade mig. Tack.

## Appendix C

### Interview Questions

- 1   a) Could you please tell me about your life when you were a child beginning from the time when you were born.  
     b) How would you describe your childhood?
- 2   a) I have understood that you were a soldier as a child. Could you please describe how you became part of an armed group?  
     b) Could you, please, tell me more about your life in the armed group?  
     c) Could you please describe how and when you exited the armed group?
- 3   Could you please describe the immediate period following your exit out of the armed group?
- 4   When did you leave your home country? Could you please tell me more about that?
- 5   Could you please describe your first year in Finland/Sweden?
- 6   Could you please describe your current life?
- 7   Could you please describe how you imagine yourself in the future?

## Appendix D

### Questionnaire

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Please, fill out the questionnaire. Thank you!

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**Please, come up with a name for yourself that I can use instead of your real name.**

**1. Pseudonym:**

**2. Gender:**            **Male**                      **Female**

**3. Age:**

**4. Country and place of birth:**

**5. Citizenship(s):**

**6. Ethnic background:**

**7. Year of arrival in Finland/Sweden:**

## Appendix E:

### Transcription notation system

I transcribed four interviews in the languages utilized via Poland's (2002) transcription notation system. In case of future research, I was very thorough and noted all the words that were uttered exactly the way they were pronounced (including accents, etc.). In addition, I noted all short utterances (like 'um' and 'mm') and other sounds (e.g. sighs, sneezes, overlapping speech, increase of volume, and other noises, such as people speaking loudly in another room) as well as silences. The following transcription symbols were utilized:

[ ]	Indicates overlapping speech, with "[" indicating where the overlap began and "]" indicating where the overlapped utterance ended.
:	Indicates that the sound immediately preceding the colon has been elongated, with the lengthening of sound indicated by the number of colons.
↑	Indicates that the speaker is raising pitch
↓	Indicates that the speaker is lowering pitch
...	Denotes one-second pauses during speech. For two- to three-second pauses use "(pause)" and for pauses of four or more seconds use "(long pause)" (Poland 2002, p. 641)
()	Indicate actions, such as "(coughs)", "(sighs)", "(sneezes)" and so on. Use "(laughing)" to denote one person, "(laughter)" to denote several people laughing. (Poland 2002, 641)
<u>Underlining</u>	Indicates speaker is stressing that part of the speech by increasing volume or raising/lowering pitch
Upper case	Indicates that the utterance is produced in an especially high volume (e.g. "DOH").
Punctuation intonation	Indicates speaker's intonation, e.g., the question mark "?" indicates a "questioning"
—	Indicates that an utterance is "cut off"
hhh	Indicates an out-breath
.hhh	Indicates an in-breath
()	Empty parentheses ( ) indicate the transcriber could not make out what was said/who was speaking
(Doh)	Placing parentheses around a word indicates the transcription of the word is uncertain.
(( ))	Indicates transcriber's descriptions

#### Here is a short extract from an interview:

Interviewer: *Could you tell me more about when you came here?*

Interviewee: *How life continued, or?*

Interviewer: *Mm*

Interviewee: *Yeah, we came here to Finland and (sniffled), and I started...am... I was still a tough guy (laughter) [when] I came to Finland...*

Interviewer: *[mm]*